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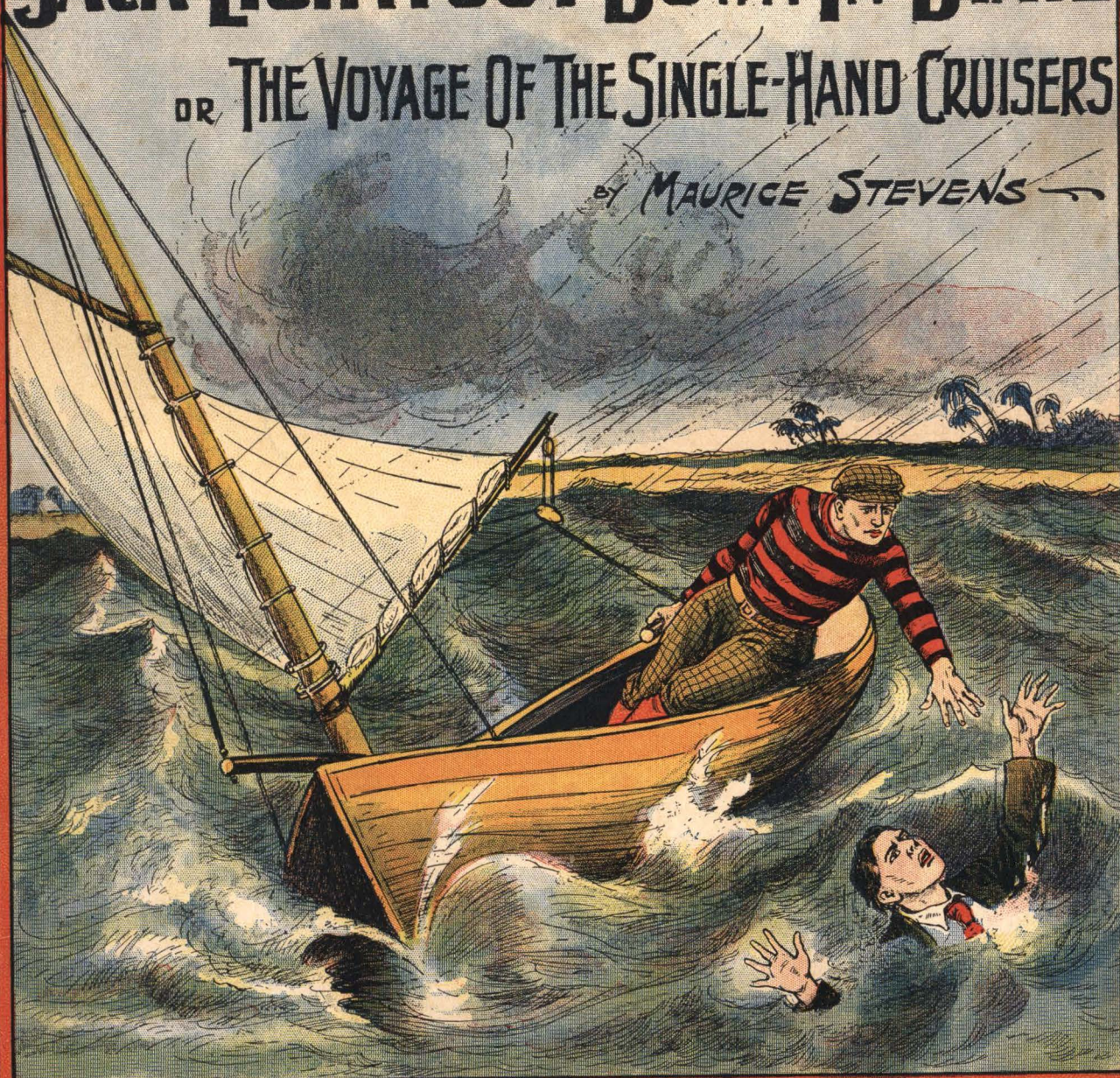
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ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY

JACK LIGHTFOOT DOWN IN DIXIE

OR THE VOYAGE OF THE SINGLE-HAND CRUISERS

BY MAURICE STEVENS



Hanging desperately to the tiller with one hand, Jack made a brave effort to clutch his fellow cruiser as he was swept on by the fierce gale.

Publishers' Note. "Teach the American boy how to become an athlete, and lay the foundation for a Constitution greater than that of the United States."—Wise sayings from "Tip Top." There has never been a time when the boys of this great country took so keen an interest in all manly and health-giving sports as they do to-day. As proof of this witness the record-breaking throngs that attend college struggles on the gridiron, as well as athletic and baseball games, and other tests of endurance and skill. In a multitude of other channels this love for the "life strenuous" is making itself manifest, so that, as a nation, we are rapidly forging to the front as seekers of honest sport. Recognizing this "handwriting on the wall," we have concluded that the time has arrived to give this vast army of young enthusiasts a publication devoted exclusively to invigorating out-door life. We feel we are justified in anticipating a warm response from our sturdy American boys, who are sure to revel in the stirring phases of sport and adventure, through which our characters pass from week to week.

ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY

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No. 47.

NEW YORK, December 30, 1905.

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JACK LIGHTFOOT DOWN IN DIXIE;

OR,

The Voyage of the Single Hand Cruisers.

By MAURICE STEVENS.

CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

Jack Lightfoot, the best all-round athlete in Cranford or vicinity, a lad clear of eye, clean of speech, and, after he had conquered a few of his faults, possessed of a faculty for *doing things* while others were talking, that by degrees caused him to be looked upon as the natural leader in all the sports Young America delights in—a boy who in learning to conquer himself put the power into his hands to wrest victory from others.

Tom Lightfoot, Jack's cousin, and sometimes his rival; though their striving for the mastery was always of the friendly, generous kind. Tom was called the "Book-Worm" by his fellows, on account of his love for studying such secrets of nature as practical observers have discovered and published; so that he possessed a fund of general knowledge calculated to prove useful when cruising along the wonderful Indian River of Florida.

Lafe Lampton, a big, hulking chap, with an ever present craving for something to eat. Lafe always had his appetite along, and proved a stanch friend of our hero through thick and thin.

Mr. Linscott, a genial Florida planter and orange grower whose home was upon the Indian River, to whom Jack bore a letter of introduction from his father.

Zeb Sully, who worked for the planter, and who was able to give our adventurers many valuable pointers concerning things that were strange to their Northern eyes.

Job Dean, an exile whose health compelled him to live where balmy breezes blew—and who incidentally and providentially was fond of ducks.

The Pigsons, a family of "crackers" who liked to indulge in pork of some other person's raising.

CHAPTER I.

OFF FOR FLORIDA.

"Great—I should say so!" exclaimed Jack Lightfoot.

"Greater than great!" declared his cousin Tom.

"Never anything like it!" supplemented husky Lafe Lampton, too excited even to think of eating.

"Father's all right, boys!"

"Right with a capital R, Jack."

"All capitals!" roared Lafe. "Every blessed letter and all in display type!"

"That true, Lafe, old man."

"Never a truer word spoken," cried Tom.

"Never in this world," gurgled Lafe, with a tremendous headshake. "I'm so filled up with something that wants to come out and can't that I'm choking. Gee whiz! I wish I could run over and spill myself."

This brought a laugh from all three, such a long and ringing laugh as never was heard in the old shed-room at Jack Lightfoot's, for all that much hearty merri-

ment had echoed from its trophy-hung, sporting-equipped wall.

It's a quite safe wager, however, that no three boys ever felt more like laughing, shouting, dancing, in fact doing anything in the whole category of outward expression, to give relief to their pent-up feelings.

As Lafe Lampton had declared, only in his own inimitable fashion, one and all were fairly filled to overflowing, bubbling up to the very brim with more than they could say, think, or even hope to express.

What were they doing?

And why all this joyous agitation?

No wonder you ask.

It can be explained in a nutshell, however.

Several days before, since the return of Jack Lightfoot's father with a snug little fortune, Jack had expressed a wish to enjoy one good long outing, one grand sporting trip into a new country and amid scenes he never had viewed, as a sort of invigorating and broadening-out experience in advance of certain educational projects to be undertaken a little later.

Immensely to Jack's delight his father had immediately favored the idea, no doubt appreciating the valuable impressions a youthful mind receives during such an experience.

He had done more than merely favor the scheme.

He had volunteered not only to pay Jack's entire expenses on such a trip, but also those of his cousin Tom and one other boy whom Jack should select, insisting that at least two companions would be required to make the outing a thoroughly enjoyable one.

Naturally enough Jack's gratitude and enthusiasm knew no bounds, and for some time he neither could contain nor express himself.

His father managed to calm him, after awhile, however, and then the project was more quietly considered and discussed.

To make a long story short, Jack had chosen to visit the famous Southern State of Florida, with Tom for one companion, and the other his sturdy, reliable and loyal old chum, Lafe Lampton.

It being a time when all could go without any serious disadvantages, it then being early in January, their plans were speedily shaped up, and the final preparations for the trip were being made that very evening in the shed-room, where the boys were engaged in packing such sporting equipments as they knew would be required.

Naturally enough their enthusiasm had lost none of its zest, and not for a moment could they, when together, cease talking of the anticipated outing, and ex-

tolling the splendid generosity of Jack Lightfoot's father.

So the cat now is out of the bag and their joyous hilarity briefly explained.

They were to leave Cranford the following morning, and about half the town was prepared to give them a grand old send-off.

"Don't spill yourself, Lafe," advised Jack, when he could repress his laughter following the former's remarks. "You may get more than you like of that over the steamer's rail during our voyage south."

"That will be spilling of another kind," cried Lafe, with a ludicrous grimace. "Gee, but I can imagine it. I hate to think of myself letting go anything I've once got fairly into my stomach."

"That's not much like you, Lafe, for a fact," said Tom.

"I have the same faculty with my stomach, Tom, that you have with your head," laughed Lafe.

"How is that?"

"I have a capacity for grub, and you for ideas."

"That's one reason why father wanted Tom with us, Lafe," put in Jack. "He says there is lots to be seen and learned in Florida, and that a bookworm like Tom will be as good as having an encyclopedia with us."

"I guess that's right, Jack."

"He flatters me, I fear," Tom modestly protested, despite that there was much truth in what had been said.

"Not by a long chalk, Tom."

"I look forward with much pleasure," added the latter, "to visiting this famous Land of Flowers, this home of the Seminoles, this historic country discovered by the famous Ponce de Leon, and all the——"

"Oh, gee! I look forward rather to oranges and bananas," interrupted Lafe.

"And I to a crack at some good big game," cried Jack Lightfoot, whipping to his shoulder the rifle he then was making ready to pack. "A bear, a panther, any old thing that shall be worth the powder and ball."

"Going to take your Winchester along, eh?"

"You bet, Lafe, and every other shooting-iron I own."

"That's me, too, Jack."

"There'll be something doing along the Indian River, you may wager your old boots on that."

"That's where we wind up, isn't it?"

"Well, that's where we are bound," laughed Jack. "It's hard to say just where we shall wind up."

"Has your father heard from Mr. Linscott?" in-

quired Tom, busy over a box containing his fishing outfit.

"Yes," replied Jack. "He received a long telegram this morning in reply to his letter."

"Everything all right?"

"Sure thing," Jack nodded. "Mr. Linscott is an old friend of my father, and he owns a place to which we are to go first and make a sort of temporary headquarters. It was because of knowing Mr. Linscott to be there that father was particularly pleased by my choosing to visit Florida. He at once wrote to Mr. Linscott stating all of the circumstances, and we are sure of a royal welcome."

"That's the stuff."

"Just where is this Indian River that we are bound for?" asked Lafe. "I don't quite place it."

"It is close upon the east coast of Florida," cried Jack.

"From what I have heard of it," supplemented Tom, "it is more like a long lagoon than a river."

"I guess that's right, Tom."

"It lies very close to the ocean in many localities, and extends south for a long distance."

"Can vessels reach it?"

"Oh, yes, small ones," nodded Tom. "It is connected with the big Mosquito Lagoon by a canal, I believe, and the two form an interior waterway for nearly two hundred miles."

"Gee, but it's quite a little puddle," grinned Lafe.

"There is an entrance from the ocean through what is known as Mosquito Inlet, which is some miles south of Daytona. The river is called the Halifax there. The country is very low in places along there, with no end of marshes, swamps and lagoons."

"Any game there?"

"No doubt of it, Lafe. There used to be plenty of deer, bear, raccoons and a good many wildcats and panthers, while birds abound in vast numbers. Curious fellows, too, pelicans, herons, gulls and no end of smaller birds."

"Gee, that'll be great!"

"It certainly will be very interesting."

"And exciting, too, I imagine," added Lafe. "If we go on a cruise down the Indian River and do any camping, as we intend, we shall need a tent, won't we?"

"I am told that we can obtain all that we may require in that line from Mr. Linscott," replied Jack. "Father has been at his place and knows all the ropes."

"Good enough."

"All we need to carry are our personal equipments," added Jack.

"Do you know where the place is, Jack?"

"Not exactly, Lafe."

"How will we find it?"

"We are to be met at Daytona by a friend of his, who then will take us in charge."

"That's more like it," said Lafe, with approval.

"No doubt we shall see wonders and do——"

"It is useless to speculate upon what we shall see and do," Jack Lightfoot interposed, with a genial laugh. "We are going into a new country for us, amid strange scenes and possibly into stirring adventures. That we shall see and do more than any one of us can possibly anticipate goes without saying."

"That's right, too, Jack."

"The Indian River joins with the Atlantic by another inlet besides that which Tom has mentioned," added Jack.

"Yes, the Indian River Inlet," put in Tom promptly, lest his knowledge of geography should be questioned. "That is at the southern end of the river, Jack, near St. Lucie. And there are still others called Santa Lucia and Jupiter."

"Right," nodded Jack. "Mr. Linscott's place, however, is near the northern part of the river where it joins with the big Mosquito Lagoon. So we are to go to New Smyrna, where our guide is to meet us. Then we shall probably go down to the river by the way of the lagoon."

"I see."

"We are to go to Jacksonville by the Clyde Line steamer," added Jack; "and then by the East Coast railway to Daytona. The trip will take several days."

"Gee, I can't wait for morning to come," cried Lafe feverishly. "I've been all of a shake ever since I knew I was to go on this trip."

Morning came with customary regularity, however, and the day dawned crisp and clear.

The boys were to leave Cranford by an early train to New York, and when they arrived at the station a large crowd of school friends, also their parents and some neighbors, were there to see them start and wish them a good voyage.

Among the throng on the platform were Nellie Conner and Kate Strawn, at sight of whom Jack felt an additional thrill of pleasure and to whom he bade a particularly fond good-by.

Like time and tide, however, trains wait for no man. With the checking of baggage and the hustle and bustle attending the departure, the few remaining minutes quickly passed and the whistle of the approaching train was heard in the near distance.

Then came hurried hand-shaking, a father's hearty grip, a mother's loving kisses, the final words of farewell; and before the three boys fairly realized it they were on the train, and all that remained when they rushed out to the rear platform were the fading of familiar scenes, the receding station, the animated throng, the waving of hands and hats and handkerchiefs, a last look at endeared forms and beloved faces—all through eyes bedimmed with tears despite them.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Lafe, with a mighty choking in his throat. "This is the toughest part of it!"

Jack Lightfoot threw off much of the same feeling, and, turning quickly, he clapped Lafe heartily on the back.

"Cheer up!" he shouted, though his own eyes were moist. "Think where we're bound, Lafe! Think where we're going! We're off for Florida!"

CHAPTER II.

NEW SCENES.

Five days later.

At about nine o'clock in the morning, a broad, flat-bottomed boat carrying a single mast well forward, and spreading a full sail to a light northerly breeze, was standing past the famous Mosquito Inlet, which lies quite a few miles south of the historic old city of St. Augustine.

Seated at her tiller was a lank, raw-boned man of forty, roughly clad, but with a smile as warm and genial as the sunshine that lent luster to the blue of the broad Atlantic stretching away to the eastward, or turned to flashing diamonds the spray and drops from the breakers crashing on the nearer shore.

Beside this man at the tiller sat Jack Lightfoot, with Tom and Lafe Lampton occupying a thwart amidships; while stored to good advantage fore and aft were the trunks and traps which five days before had been hustled aboard the train at the Cranford station.

The boys had arrived safely at Daytona after a more interesting than specially eventful trip, and there they had been met that morning by a man from Mr. Lin-scott's place, one of his own hands, with a boat to transport them to their destination.

The stranger had introduced himself as Zeb Sully, and, though he was far from handsome, and spoke with a broad Southern accent, his hearty greeting and genial manner at once won the liking of all.

The trunks and traps had been hurried aboard the craft, and within an hour after their meeting with Sully, with whom the boys speedily began to feel per-

fectly well acquainted, all hands were aboard and speeding through the inlet as previously mentioned.

"Gee! but it seems funny to be in summer clothes and sweating hard in January," cried Lafe, mopping his brow after the exercise taken in getting under way. "Only think, Jack! Snow and ice up in Cranford."

Jack Lightfoot laughed, yet both he and Tom were much more interested in viewing this new country, the broad passage near the lighthouse through which Zeb was guiding the boat, and in the long line of foaming breakers which almost masked the narrow inlet from an ocean view.

Zeb quickly noticed this interest on their part, and volunteered such information as he could impart.

"New sights for you boys, eh?" said he smiling. "I reckon you've never been South afore."

"No, never, Mr. Sully," replied Jack. "Everything looks strange to me, even the sky."

"Well, that will look a little strange at night all right," laughed the man. "But say, while I think of it. You'd better begin right early to call me Zeb—that's my fust name. I allas like to feel to hum with my friends, so my name's Zeb to you lads hereafter."

"Good for you!" blustered Lafe, with an impulsive display of approval. "That's the style of man we like. My name's Lafe, and his is Jack, and his is Tom. We're all right, too, every one of us, Zeb."

"Right so, Lafe," grinned the man, close-hauling the sheet. "Have a good look at yonder ocean, boys, if you like. You'll see some water of another sort right soon."

Jack glanced out over the broad sea and foaming breakers then through the inlet they were entering.

"Where does this take us?" he asked.

"Into the lagoon."

"Mosquito Lagoon?"

"Yes, arter a while. It's upward of quite a few miles through the old Hillsboro River."

"Pretty shallow all about here, isn't it?"

"Yes, all the way south. Can't skin around much except with a flat-bottomed craft."

"What is that prominent point off yonder?" asked Tom.

"That's what's called Massacre Bluff," replied Zeb. "It's where a crew of shipwrecked sailors was killed by a lot of Seminole Indians a good many years ago."

"Are there any Indians around here now?"

"Farther south, but none up to that business."

"What are those trees, Zeb?" asked Lafe, gazing

out at a clump now visible in the wide stretch of scrub-lands they were rapidly approaching.

"Palmettos," said Zeb tersely.

"You ought to have recognized that tree, Lafe," remarked Tom. "There have been pictures enough of them in our geographies, and we saw some from the train."

"Never look at a geography unless I have to," grinned Lafe.

"Sometimes they are called cabbage-palms," added Tom. "In the Malay Archipelago the natives gather betel-nuts from one species of palmettos and chew them for their intoxicating property."

"Chewing isn't in my line," laughed Lafe. "Only grub!"

"You're all right at that, anyway," smiled Jack.

"There's plenty of palmettos down this way, boys," said Zeb. "Afore long, arter we get up in the creeks and lagoons, you'll see some mangroves."

"That's another kind of a tree, Lafe," laughed Tom.

"Did you think I didn't know 'twas a tree," growled Lafe, with a contemptuous stare. "Mebbe you think I thought 'twas a vine."

"Sometimes their roots and trunks look like huge vines, Lafe, for all that."

So the talk continued during a half-hour run through the river past New Smyrna and on to the great lagoon.

As they worked farther south the country appeared more barren, with broad expanse of marsh-land and swamps, intersected with numerous creeks, dotted with clumps of palmettos and mangroves, while the distant view was backed by a horizon of dark-green turpentine pines.

Stretching away to the south was a vast waste of scrub-land and pine-barren, and along about noon a broad sweep of low-lying water came into view, which Zeb promptly informed the boys was a part of the great Mosquito Lagoon.

"We now follow this to the south," he explained, while the boys regarded with interest the great waste of water. "And then we work through into the Indian River."

"Can we make that to-day?" asked Jack.

"Oh, yes, barrring bad luck."

"We might have come down to Titusville by rail," added Jack. "Wouldn't that have been nearer for us?"

"Yes," nodded Zeb. "But the boss had business for me up Daytona way, and he thought you boys might like coming down the lagoon."

"That was very thoughtful."

"What's that land out yonder?" asked Lafe, pointing off to the east as they bore away south.

"That's the sand ridge between the lagoon and the Atlantic Ocean," Zeb explained. "It looks about like that all the way down the coast, only it's wider in some places than others."

Lafe viewed for some moments the low ridge of ground, covered for the most part with a scrubby growth of saw palmetto, with a solitary palm here and there, or a clump of them at long intervals.

"How many men does Mr. Linscott employ?" asked Jack, with some curiosity as to whom he was about to meet.

"Four besides me."

"Has he a family?"

"Only his wife."

"He is in the orange-raising business, isn't he?"

"No he doesn't do much with oranges," replied Zeb, shaking his head. "He grows mostly lemons, limes and guaves, along with some pineapples."

"Gee, I won't do a thing to pineapples!" murmured Lafe, with a wink at Tom Lightfoot.

"Is this place quite near the Indian River?" inquired Jack.

"Right on it," laughed Zeb. "We're some ways from any town, but the land's right good where we are, and his fruit turns out over the general run."

"Has he any boats?"

"Half-a-dozen of 'em."

"I suppose he will rent us what we require?"

"Well, no, there'll not be any renting done," said Zeb, with a twinkle in one corner of his eye. "I heard him tell his wife that you chaps must have anything on the place. Then she said she'd be mighty glad if you wanted the whole business, it's so long since she's seen any Northern boys."

"Well, well, that was very kind," laughed Jack, with much appreciation.

"I'll bet they are the right sort," declared Lafe.

"Yes, he's a fine man, Mr. Linscott," nodded Zeb.

"Is there pretty good fishing and gunning to be had on the river?" asked Jack.

"Right good now, Jack. This is just the season."

"Is there any big game?"

"Well, you might strike a deer by going arter him a good ways," rejoined Zeb; "but you'd take mighty smart chances of getting lost in the woods, which would be more than a deer is worth. They run small down this way, you know."

"Are there any bears?"

"Only stray ones, and them mighty seldom. There

used to be a good many about here, but that was some time ago."

"I'd like to have got a crack at one bear."

"Ain't looking for trouble, are you?" inquired Zeb laughing.

"No, not exactly that," smiled Jack. "Good game sport is what I'm looking for."

"You'll find that, Jack, all right," the man now rejoined, with a nod. "There are plenty of 'coons and no end of birds, big and small, while if you're really out for something to keep you busy you'll have no trouble in stirring up a wildcat most any time."

"I don't think I'm out for bob-cats," laughed Jack.

"I have heard that there are plenty of birds along the river," remarked Tom Lightfoot.

"Well, I should say so," grinned Zeb, displaying a double row of huge teeth turned yellow with tobacco. "The air is full of them."

"Any ducks?"

"Millions of 'em, Jack, such as they be. There's no end of fowl and small birds good for eating, and for bigger ones there are rafts of blue heron, gulls, pelicans, cranes and eagles. You'll find plenty of gunning, boys, if that's what you're looking for."

"That's what we want, Zeb, along with seeing this wonderful country."

It is indeed a wonderful region, the great wild and wooded section lying to the west and the long stretch of scrub-grown sand that separates the river from the blue waters and breakers of the east coast.

This vast stretch of land is nearly two hundred miles in length, varying in breadth from a few hundred yards to upward of five miles, and nearly covered with scrub and low trees and vast quantities of thorny plants.

It is the home of hordes of raccoons and smaller animals, along with wild hogs and wildcats; while the deadly moccasin and the huge rattlesnake are frequently met there, the latter of which often makes things lively for the inexperienced hunter who hears his warning rattle for the first time.

Much of the talk between Zeb and the Cranford boys was interspersed with observations and remarks of a less pertinent nature, but for the most part it related to the scenes around them, and served in a measure as an introduction to the startling incidents and stirring adventures they were soon fated to experience.

As they worked farther south, they began to see many of the things of which Zeb had spoken and the novelty of the scene aroused an ever-increasing interest.

The vast sweep of calm and shallow water; the numerous great clumps of mangroves rising along the shore nearest the ocean, with their curiously gnarled and twisted roots protruding above the surface; the low, thickly wooded shore on the west side; the countless crooks and creeks partly masked with tall water-grasses and sedge, the home of the heron and the huge crane, and the awkward pelican with his curious pouch—all of them soon were seen in great numbers, and the interest of the boys was redoubled by the novelties which the passing moments brought.

Suddenly, Lafe Lampton startled all hands by leaping wildly to his feet and shouting, with his eyes half starting from his head:

"Oh, by thunder, there's a bear! Look, Zeb, look! Isn't that a bear?"

CHAPTER III.

THE BATTLE IN THE AIR.

Jack Lightfoot and Tom came to their feet in an instant, though Zeb retained his seat at the tiller; yet the eyes of all were turned in the direction Lafe was excitedly pointing.

The animal he had discovered was plainly visible amid the scrub and bushes which lined the east shore of the lagoon some fifty yards away—a low, black fellow prowling along with his nose to the ground, yet which was lifted the moment Lafe shouted, revealing a long snout and a pair of narrow bright eyes.

Zeb laughed lightly and quickly shook his head.

"No, that's no bear, Lafe," said he. "That's a razor-back."

"Razor-back?"

"A razor-back hog," explained Zeb.

"Gee whiz! I thought 'twas a bear," growled Lafe, with a look of chagrin that brought a long laugh from Jack and Tom. "It looks enough like one from here, with that black hide. A razor-back hog, is it?"

"That's what," nodded Zeb. "We raise them down here for eating, but we don't confine them as hogs are raised up North. We let 'em run wild. That one most likely belongs to the man whose bean patch and lime grove you can see just below here, with the roof of a house visible over yonder."

"That's a lime grove, is it, Zeb?" asked Jack.

"Yes, limes and lemons. They do better farther south though. Too much danger of frost here nowadays."

"Run wild, eh?" said Lafe, with his interest still

centered on the hog. "I should think the porkers'd be stolen."

"Sometimes they are," rejoined Sully, with a rather grim shake of his head. "Mr. Linscott's been missing a good many of his in the past three months, and we haven't been able to find out who's been lifting 'em. We'd fill 'em full of bird shot, if we could catch 'em at it. Most likely it's some of the Florida crackers. There's plenty of 'em round our diggings."

"What the deuce is a Florida cracker?" asked Lafe, with a perplexed look.

"A cracker?" echoed Zeb, with a laugh. "Don't you know what a Florida cracker is, Lafe?"

"No, I'm sure I don't. 'Tisn't a fire-cracker, is it?"

"No, not much," roared Zeb, hardly able to hold his laughter. "You'll know him all right when you see him, Lafe. He's a long, lank, skinny critter, generally dressed 'bout like a scarecrow in a bean-field. He's what the niggers down here call 'the poor white trash.'"

"Oh, he's a man, is he?"

"Well, he's a sort o' sketch and outline of a man, that's 'bout all," declared Zeb. "He never has nuthing, and the critter's too lazy to work and git anything. What's called a cracker, Lafe, is a white native of Florida, them of the poorest classes, and they're the laziest, doggondest lot o' loafers in the world. I reckon it's some of 'em that's been stealing Mr. Linscott's razor-backs, but we ain't been able to git onto 'em yet."

"Well, I'm glad I've found out, Zeb," laughed Lafe. "Much obliged."

"You'll often run across 'em out gunning for a breakfast, along with a mangy dog or two," added Zeb, who plainly had no love for the "crackers." "You'll know one all right when you see him."

"Oh, I say, Zeb, what are those birds?" interposed Jack Lightfoot, suddenly starting to his feet. "Are they buzzards?"

"Yes, that's just what they are, Jack."

They had come in sight of an open section of land on the west shore, where the railway skirting the river was in plain view for a considerable distance.

On the slight rise presented was one of the strangest sights one often sees, yet by no means inviting.

To begin with it consisted of a dead cow lying upon the ground, badly bruised and broken, while about the dead animal walked a young calf, occasionally bleating in most mournful fashion.

Gathered about the carcass, in an almost perfect circle fully thirty feet in diameter, were squatted more

buzzards than Jack could have counted in a good half-hour. They sat squatted ten or twelve deep in this perfect circle, not one of them moving, not one of them uttering a cry, but all gazing with a sort of horrible anticipation at the decomposing carcass which occupied the middle of their ring. The ground was fairly black with them, and a more curious and disgusting spectacle one seldom sees.

"Yes, they're buzzards all right," repeated Zeb. "They were there just as you see 'em when I went up to Daytona early this morning."

"Not sitting just like that?" cried Jack amazedly.

"Couldn't tell a bit o' difference," grinned Zeb. "Mebbe there's a dozen or two more of 'em, but that many don't count in a crowd like that. I'll bet some of 'em ain't moved a feather since morning."

"But why is that?"

"They're waiting for that calf to die, or get out," explained Zeb. "The cow must have been hit by a passing train and killed. She was tossed out this way and the calf is still sticking beside her, not knowing what else to do."

"And the buzzards are waiting to devour the carcass?"

"That's what they're waiting for, Jack," nodded the man. "They're a bit afraid of the calf, you see, and don't dare come nearer while she's there. Besides, they don't mind waiting much, for the cow's quite fresh killed."

"What has that to do with it, Zeb?"

"Buzzards ain't much on fresh meat," was the grim reply. "They allas wait till it begins to smell, afore it's quite to their liking."

"What a disgusting scene," muttered Jack, with a frown.

"Isn't it?" growled Lafe. "Gosh! I shan't have any appetite for my supper if I keep looking at those things."

"Why don't you look at something else, then?" demanded Tom. "There are plenty of other objects to view. Have a look at that group of cranes over next to that sedge grass under the east shore."

"By gracious! there is one bouncer among them," put in Jack, now turning to gaze. "He must stand close upon four feet tall."

"'Bout that," nodded Zeb. "He's quite a big one."

"Look how he has his head bent."

"He's looking for a fish. If you watch him, mebbe you'll see him go down and get it."

The crane had been standing in about a foot of water, as motionless as if carved from wood, but even

while Zeb was speaking the bird's head darted like a flash below the surface.

In an instant it reappeared, with a good-sized fish flapping furiously in its long bill.

The crane quickly soared upward, with its splendid spread of wings sweeping the air with a most majestic motion.

It had risen less than thirty yards, however, soaring almost directly above the passing boat, when the still air resounded with a single ear-splitting squawk, that gave the boys a start and caused even Zeb Sully to draw up on his seat.

"Now you'll see some fun, lads," he cried, with voice a little lowered. "Yonder comes a fish-hawk after the crane's fish. I'll bet he gets it, too. I've seen 'em do it more than once, the robbers."

Closely following the squawk, there had swept up from the scrub along the shore a large fish-hawk, yet almost infinitely smaller than the huge crane, at which he instantly directed his rapid flight.

In less than ten seconds they came together nearly above the boat.

The crane swerved, sweeping ahead of the boat, and then the pugnacious little hawk, squawking furiously, made a downward swoop, as if bent upon plucking out one of the crane's eyes with his curved talons.

"Gee, but there's going to be a fight up there," cried Lafe excitedly.

"I believe your story," said Jack.

"Keep quiet and let 'em have it out," cautioned Zeb, hauling his sheet a little closer to keep a full on the sail and prevent flapping.

Neither bird, however, appeared to notice the boat.

The crane, with the fish still wildly flapping in its bill, swerved again and swept off to one side.

Again the hawk renewed the attack, all the while making a terrible din, and by his more rapid movements was able to head off the crane whichever way it turned.

Sweep after sweep, swoop after swoop, were made in rapid succession, now directly above the boat, now off to one side or the other, and all the while scarce thirty yards away.

"Jimminy!" muttered Jack, with his hand gliding toward his hip-pocket. "If the hawk robs that splendid fellow of the fish, I'm blessed if I don't try to drop him with my revolver."

"Yes, go ahead," gurgled Lafe, half choked with excitement.

"No, no, not yet," pleaded Tom. "Let 'em have it out. Let's see which will win."

"Oh, I won't fire unless the hawk gets the fish," said Jack, intently watching the wheeling birds.

The battle in the air had increased in violence, while the boys were speaking.

Though the crane easily beat off the hawk for some time, the rapid wheelings and swervings he was compelled to make in order to avoid the pugnacious little robber, were evidently beginning to weary him.

Suddenly the hawk flew straight upward some yards, and then, with a tremendous squawk, shot furiously down at the crane's head.

The crane ducked and nearly lost hold of the flapping fish.

The hawk turned like a flash and got the fish by the tail.

Then, for upward of ten seconds, they both had a grip on it tugging furiously, till the hawk lost its equilibrium in the desperate fight and had to let go of his end.

Off went the crane again, now hoping no doubt to escape.

But the dauntless little hawk was more determined than ever.

Up he flew again fully ten yards above the crane, then turned and shot downward like a bolt of lightning.

Evidently he now was too mad to squawk, for he made this last lightning move with no noise but a fierce whiz through the still air as he descended.

The crane swerved and tried to elude him, but the attempt proved utterly vain.

They met for an instant in a confusion of flapping wings and flying feathers, a mix-up in which the excited boys hardly could tell what was going on up there; but when it ended the crane went wheeling toward the scrubby shore with its bill empty, while off flew the triumphant hawk with the fish in his talons.

Jack Lightfoot had drawn his revolver and had it ready.

"It seems a pity, after the game fight he put up, but here goes!" he cried quickly.

As he spoke he raised the weapon and his keen eye flashed over the steady barrel.

The hawk was good thirty yards distant, and flying at an awkward angle.

It was a hundred to one that only a most expert marksman could hit him.

Bang! bang! bang!

Thrice Jack's revolver spoke in rapid succession. A film of smoke was wafted like a veil upon the air. Through it the eager eyes of the boys beheld a clump

of feathers leave the flying bird, then a loose fish fell flapping through the air and vanished into the water below, and then—down plunged the stricken hawk, shot through the breast.

"Hurrah!" yelled Tom Lightfoot, at the top of his lungs.

"Gee, that was a corking shot!" roared Lafe, executing a dance that threatened to capsize the boat.

"It was a good shot, a mighty good one," Zeb warmly declared, thrusting out his big begrimed paw to shake Jack's hand. "I never saw a better one in my life, not with one o' them little popguns."

It was, indeed, a remarkably fine piece of marksmanship, of which Jack might well have felt proud, yet he answered modestly:

"Well, I wanted my first shot in the South to be a good one, and luck was with me. Before I return North, Zeb, possibly I shall do even better."

"You couldn't do better, Jack," the man heartily cried.

"It seemed a pity to kill the hawk," said Jack, "but I couldn't resist the temptation to try my hand."

"Well, you've got one satisfaction," laughed Zeb, easing off the sheet and rising to his feet.

"What's that, Zeb?" inquired Jack.

"You saved the life of the fish."

"Yes, that's true," laughed Lightfoot.

"Now we'll lay to in the shade of yonder mangroves and have a bite to eat."

"Gee, that won't hurt my feelings!" cried Lafe, jumping up. "Want to strike the sail?"

"Yes, you might let go the halliards. After having a bite, boys, we'll go on our way. If this wind holds, and I reckon it will, we'll sight home well afore sun-down."

CHAPTER IV.

INDIAN RIVER.

As Zeb Sully had predicted, the wind held fresh and fair that afternoon, and just as the sun was running low in the west the Cranford boys arrived at Mr. Linscott's place, which in a measure they had regarded as their destination.

Though somewhat isolated, the nearest neighbors being two miles distant, it was located on a fine section of land overlooking a broad stretch of the Indian River, a plantation consisting chiefly of lemons and limes, with a few guaves and pineapples. Mr. Linscott had been frozen out once, but just at present his

groves looked as good as anything between Titusville and Rockledge.

All viewed the scene with mingled interest and delight as they approached it—the acres of regularly planted trees, the prettily situated dwelling and grounds, the profusion of plants and flowers, the numerous out-buildings, the well constructed landing on the river bank, the several boats made fast along the shore, and, above all, the portly, middle-aged man and woman who stood waiting for them on the landing.

These were Mr. Linscott and his wife, both Northern people, the one a genial and generous man, the other a whole-hearted, motherly woman, both glad enough to see friends from the North; and, as Jack had said to his companions, in the shed-room nearly a week before, their reception was a royal one.

The Florida twilight is brief, however, so there was but little time for looking about out of doors, and supper soon was in order.

Lafe Lampton did himself justice at the table, despite the buzzards, and maintained his enviable reputation, for who shall say that a good appetite is not a good thing?

Before the boys had been a half-hour in the house they were made to feel perfectly at home.

A thousand and one questions were asked and answered, but none specially worthy of note till quite late in the evening, when Mr. Linscott genially remarked:

"Well, Jack, I suppose you boys have come down here with some project in the way of amusement, aside from looking about; and what I may do to entertain you."

"Yes, Mr. Linscott, we have," Jack promptly answered.

"Let's hear what it is."

"Well, sir, we would like to go on a hunting cruise down the Indian River."

"So that's your scheme, eh?"

"Yes, sir, providing we can get a boat and such equipments for camping as we shall require."

"I guess there'll be no trouble about that," said Mr. Linscott, with a furtive smile and wink at his wife. "How long do you intend being gone?"

"Well, sir, we figure upon putting in about a week."

"If a wildcat doesn't eat you up," laughed their host.

"We'll take the chances of that, sir."

"You have your own guns, your father wrote me, and all the sporting equipments you require."

"Yes, sir, everything in that line."

"Zeb tells me you're a crack shot."

"Well, sir, we will not come back empty-handed, I think," laughed Jack.

"That's right, too, sir," supplemented Lafe, with a nod of assurance.

"We shall need a small tent, Mr. Linscott," said Jack.

"I've got one for you," smiled Mr. Linscott.

"And a few cooking utensils."

"They are down in the boat-house."

"Also a few provisions which——"

"Which are already on hand."

"Well, sir!" exclaimed Jack laughing. "It strikes me that you have already provided about everything we shall need."

"So I have, Jack, as a matter of fact," bowed Mr. Linscott, joining in the laugh. "And you may give your father most of the credit, for he wrote just what your wishes and plans consisted and requested me to anticipate your needs."

"That's just like him," cried Tom Lightfoot, with much appreciation.

"And very kind of you, sir," added Jack.

"Well, the pleasure is not all yours," smiled Mr. Linscott. "I have about everything ready for you. There is only one thing which I expected to have had, but have been unable to get."

"What is that, sir?"

"A suitable boat for such a cruise, one large enough for all hands, and the comfortable stowing of your traps," explained Mr. Linscott. "Just at this time I am using the one you had to-day, so I cannot well let her go."

"Nor would we wish to deprive you of her," said Jack quickly.

"I have a scheme, however, of which I think you will approve. I suppose each of you can handle a sail-boat."

"Oh, yes, sir."

"We are A B's, all of us," put in Lafe.

"I have three capital little boats of my own, just suited to such a trip," continued Mr. Linscott. "You each may take one, stowing portions of your traps in each, for which there is ample room, and you can make the cruise single-handed. How does that strike you?"

"The cruise of the single-handers," cried Jack, with enthusiasm.

"Out of sight, sir," nodded Lafe.

"It will give each of you a boat to handle and look after, and as they are of the same size and model, spreading the same stretch of canvas, it will enable you

to do a little racing and test your seamanship, if so inclined."

"That will be great," cried Tom Lightfoot approvingly. "I fancy this plan even more than going in one boat."

"So do I, sir," said Jack.

"In that case," laughed Mr. Linscott; "I can fit you out from keel to truck. All of the boats are in good condition, and the camping outfit I have provided is now in the boat-house. In the morning we will go down and look it all over, and such things can be added as you may suggest."

"I venture to say that we cannot improve upon what you have done, Mr. Linscott," Jack gratefully rejoined. "I'm sure we all appreciate your kindness."

"Indeed we do," cried Tom Lightfoot, and Lafe, with one breath.

"Very good," bowed Mr. Linscott. "I should enjoy having you remain here with us, yet I know you will derive much more pleasure and excitement from the cruise, and I would not willingly disappoint you. Yet I wish you to remain to-morrow and look about a bit. You can devote part of the day making ready for the cruise, however, and get under way as early as you wish the following morning."

"Your every suggestion suits to the very letter, Mr. Linscott," said Jack.

"Your father wrote me that you are capable and thoroughly self-reliant, yet there are a few dangers against which I must caution you," Mr. Linscott now said, more gravely.

"What are those, sir?"

"Do not stir up any wildcats, if you can possibly avoid it."

The boys all laughed, and Jack promptly answered:

"We'll bear that in mind, sir, and cut out the wildcats—unless one meddles with us," he added, with significant grimness.

"In that case," laughed Mr. Linscott; "plug him with the first shot. They die hard, boys, and can put up a very nasty fight."

"We will look out for them, sir."

"You also must keep an eye open for moccasins and the diamond-backed rattlesnake when ashore," added their host. "Both snakes are deadly poison, unless a strike from one is quickly and properly treated. I

will give you some instructions about that in the morning, and such remedies as you should have with you."

"We will be watchful, Mr. Linscott, I promise you," replied Jack.

"It now is ten o'clock, and you'd best turn in. Tomorrow we will have a look about the place, and you then may make ready for your cruise."

The boys were given a large double chamber, enabling them to room together, and they retired very weary that night, yet feeling that their host was one man in a million, and that their first day in Florida was one to be remembered.

In a way, however, it was as nothing to those that followed.

Next morning Mr. Linscott showed them over his entire place, giving them all of the points relating to the growing of the various fruits and vegetables which he raised.

It goes without saying that the boys saw many things of exceeding interest, the curious prickly pine-apples, an orange tree, both in fragrant blossom and laden with ripe fruit, and the succulent guava, with which Lafe Lampton regaled himself to the top limit.

Bookworm Tom had something to say about nearly all of them, moreover, and Mr. Linscott appeared somewhat surprised at the general knowledge he displayed, commending it with much approval.

In the afternoon the boys visited the boat-house, to which they took their guns and fishing outfit, with all the equipments they had brought from Cranford.

Jack surveyed with an experienced eye the three boats they were to use, and expressed himself with much satisfaction.

They were flat-bottomed, the Indian River being very shallow, except in places where a devious channel follows the course of the stream.

The boats were about sixteen feet long, with five feet of beam, carrying a single large sail, with the mast set well forward, much after the rig of a cat.

"They are all right, just what we want," Jack said approvingly.

"Couldn't be better," declared Lafe Lampton.

"There's enough forward deck around the mast to form a shelter for our ammunition and the things we

wish to keep dry in case of rain, and they are roomy enough to carry all of our luggage."

"They are fine," said Tom. "As Lafe remarked, they couldn't be better."

"They will handle easy moreover," added Jack, "and we can have great sport, each with a boat for himself."

"I should say so!"

"We'll get our traps aboard this afternoon, and be ready to get under way in the early morning."

"That's the stuff!" cried Lafe.

Then they set to work with a will, and at five o'clock that afternoon everything was in readiness.

Mr. Linscott occasionally came down to watch them, and he saw at a glance that they knew their business, which naturally relieved him of any serious apprehensions as to their safety.

The following day dawned clear and warm, and before seven o'clock in the morning the boys were ready to get under way.

Mr. Linscott and his wife, together with Zeb and the other men employed on the place, had gathered on the landing to see them start, and were watching their movements with much interest.

Lafe and Tom already were aboard their crafts, with sails set and flapping, and were making ready to cast off.

Jack Lightfoot, however, still was on the landing; and he happened to overhear the remark Zeb Sully then made to his employer.

"Two more of our hogs are missing this morning, Mr. Linscott," said he.

Mr. Linscott frowned with annoyance, saying quite irritably:

"Two more, Zeb!"

"Two of the best ones, sir."

"I'd just like to find out who is up to this thieving business," declared Mr. Linscott. "I'd make it warm for them, the rascals."

"Been missing some of your hogs, sir?" inquired Jack.

"Yes, for a number of weeks, Jack," replied Mr. Linscott. "Some rascally thieves have robbed me of a good many, and their work has been so stealthily done

that we have not been able to detect them. I would give considerable to do so."

"Well, perhaps we may run foul of the scamps," remarked Jack. "Who knows?"

Mr. Linscott laughed now, and shook his head.

"There is not much likelihood of that, Jack, I guess," said he. "Well, here's my hand, and we all wish you a fine cruise. I shall look for you back in about a week."

"I'll not remain away longer, sir, barring accidents. In which case I'll write you," cried Jack, with a hearty handshake. "Good-by, Mrs. Linscott. And you, Zeb, and all hands."

"Good-by!" shouted all, for Jack was already springing aboard his boat, with a bundle of charts in his hand, which the planter had rooted out of a trunk, and which might keep them from going aground.

"Cast off, comrades," he shouted, as he sprang to the halliards. "I'll give you a good start, but will overhaul you within a short half-mile."

A defiant laugh from Tom and Lafe answered his challenge, and at the end of another minute all three boats, with sails bellying in the fresh morning breeze, were leaving the landing rapidly astern.

The cruise of the single-handers now had fairly begun.

CHAPTER V.

A SUDDEN SQUALL.

"Cruiser, ahoy!"

"Hello-o-o!"

"Come about!"

"What's that for?" roared Lafe Lampton.

"Make a long reach for the point where we landed for lunch! There's a squall coming up."

The last was yelled at the top of his lungs by Jack Lightfoot, to one of his fellow cruisers, some two hundred yards away.

The scene was one of the broader parts of the river, full two miles across, and the low-lying shores were hardly discernible at that distance, partly owing to the change that had come over the sky and the landscape since noon.

The boys had cruised down the river without any

special incident until nearly noon, finding pleasure enough in racing their well-matched boats and in viewing the wild scenes through which they then were passing; but just at noon they had made a landing on the east peninsula for a light lunch, intending to cruise farther down the river and gun for a hearty meal about four o'clock in the afternoon, which was to be prepared while they were making camp for the night.

It was to this landing that Jack referred when yelling to Lafe Lampton.

The occasion was quite obvious, for the sky had become heavily overcast in the past quarter-hour, and dense black clouds were sweeping up from the north-east horizon.

There had been only a few indications of this sudden change when the boys got under way after lunch, yet the wind had freshened so that a double-reef was necessary, though the sky still showed only that dull gray aspect which frequently precedes an approaching violent squall.

Tom Lightfoot had advised putting out, however, and neither of his companions had opposed it, so all hands got under way again with reduced canvas.

Tom had started some little time before the others, moreover, and had got quite a lead on them, nearly half-a-mile, when Jack caught sight of the ragged look in the near north and felt the first cold sharp gust of the coming storm.

Lafe, too, now saw the trouble, and yelled back:

"What about Tom? We can't leave him."

Tom still was a good half-mile ahead of the other two boats, and was scudding down-stream before the spanking wind.

"I'll overhaul him, Lafe," shouted Jack, trimming his sheet and standing over toward Lafe, who now had come about and hung motionless in the eye of the wind.

"You can't overhaul him under a mile, Jack," cried Lafe, as the former sped within easy speaking distance.

Jack rounded up a little and eased his sheet, letting his boat glide less rapidly under the stern of the other.

"I must overhaul him," he cried. "We're booked for a nasty squall. Look at that sky."

"I believe your story. Can't you make Tom hear?"
"I'll make him hear all right," cried Jack, drawing out his revolver.

Then he fired a couple of shots in the air.

Tom Lightfoot, in the far-distant boat, to which he had been paying all of his attention in order to maintain his lead, suddenly turned and looked back.

He saw the two boats nearly together, with Lafe hanging dead into the wind, and he at first thought that some accident had occurred.

Then he saw Jack rise and point toward the northern sky, then signal for him to come about, and he now waved his hand in reply.

"He understands me, Lafe," cried Jack. "He's coming about."

"What did you tell me to do?" shouted Lafe, as the boats began to spread.

"Run up to the point where we landed for lunch," replied Jack. "Our tent is in your boat, isn't it?"

"Yes, all but the poles. Tom has them."

"Never mind," shouted Jack. "Haul your boat up and drop her sail when you get there. Then take out what you have of the tent and lug it ashore. We can make some kind of a quick shack out of it for shelter, in case the rain comes suddenly."

"All right!" yelled Lafe, waving his hand. "I understand."

Jack waited and saw him fill away on a starboard tack to stand up toward their former landing, a good half-mile away.

"He'll make it all right," he said to himself, also filling away. "I'm not so sure of Tom, in case the squall breaks violently."

Tom had come about, however, and was standing over toward the far west bank, with his sheet close hauled on a port tack.

The wind was steadily increasing in violence, as Jack had shrewdly anticipated. Blowing through the tops of a clump of palmettos on the shore some fifty yards from where he now was tacking, it made a peculiarly angry sound, especially threatening when it fiercely lashed the hanging dead leaves against the swaying trunks.

"We're going to get it hot and heavy, I fear," he

said to himself, as he hauled in his sheet and made fast.

Then he settled himself at the tiller and looked for Tom, who was bearing off in the same direction.

Under the fierce gusts of wind, which was rapidly becoming a gale, the surface of the river had been lashed into an ugly chop, which shook the small crafts from stem to stern, tossing them in a way that made a foothold exceedingly treacherous, while at times the spume and spray were hurtled over the busy skippers in blinding, drenching clouds.

Tom Lightfoot was now standing up the river on a starboard tack, evidently laboring hard in the rough water, and having all he could do to manage his boat.

A quarer-mile away Jack was fairly tearing through the water, still on a port tack, with his body crouched at the tiller he was firmly gripping, and his gaze fixed upon his cousin's desperate movements.

A moment later he ceased off a little, showing Tom a clear right of way, for they now were rapidly approaching one another at an angle, and presently they came within hailing distance.

Then Jack yelled a word of advice.

"Don't sail her so free, Tom!" he shrieked above the noisy rush of the gale. "Keep her close to the wind, and she'll not labor so badly."

"I can't do it!" roared Tom desperately. "She falls off when the waves catch her on her quarter."

"Then ease your sheet a little—ease your sheet!" yelled Jack, as he flew by scarce twenty feet astern of his excited cousin.

Tom saw the point and at once tried to take the advice given him.

In so doing, however, in order to loose his sheet from the cleat, he lost for a moment his firm grip on the tiller.

Naturally the boat instantly fell off still farther, and just then the squall broke with redoubled violence and caught the laboring craft broadside.

She went over like a flash, burying her mast and sail into the waves, and tossing Tom Lightfoot headlong into the river.

He still hung to the sheet, however, and could swim like a duck; yet the situation was not an enviable one,

the accident having occurred in the channel where the water was deepest, and the squall then being at its height.

Jack Lightfoot witnessed the catastrophe the moment it occurred.

Instantly he saw what he should do—yet to do it in that living gale was another matter.

Throwing his tiller hard down, he tried to bring his boat sharp about on the opposite tack.

She came into the wind with a leap.

For a moment the gale threatened to catch her in irons and shake the sail to threads.

Jack leaped to the sheet and trimmed in a little, and then the boat eased off.

With a lightning move he took a turn of the sheet around the cleat, then gripped the tiller.

He let the craft swing off till the wind filled her sail, when she again made way with the startled leap of a race-horse.

Now Jack threw her up a trifle, till he could close-haul the sheet and take a quick turn, then eased away, and again had her under perfect control.

All of these movements had taken but a few seconds, and, though made with lightning rapidity, Jack had not for an instant lost his head.

Now he saw Tom swimming amid the wreckage of his craft, and battling fiercely against the choppy waves.

Again he yelled to him from thirty feet away, while his boat tore like a grayhound through the surging water.

"Strike out!" he yelled. "Swim clear of the boat, Tom! Swim to the leeward. I'll pick you up."

Tom Lightfoot heard him and understood.

With a few lusty strokes he got free from the wreck, and into the clear water to leeward.

Jack's object in so advising him was to avoid a collision with the disabled boat while attempting to rescue his cousin.

In a moment he tore by the wreck to leeward and saw Tom battling the waves some twenty yards beyond, and up to windward.

For an instant Jack held his course, measuring every chance and contingency, and at just the right moment he threw his boat into the wind.

He saw Tom sweeping nearer in the turbulent water, and again he uttered a yell.

"Look out for me, Tom! Be ready!"

Hanging desperately to the tiller with one hand, Jack made a brave effort to clutch his fellow cruiser with the other as he was swept on by the fierce gale.

For a second it looked doubtful, despite his accurate calculations and efficient seamanship, and it seemed as if Tom must be swept by out of reach.

Just then Tom made a fierce lunge through the waves, however, and threw up his arm.

Jack Lightfoot pounced upon it like a terrier upon a rat.

"Hang on!" gasped Tom, nearly exhausted.

"You bet!" cried Jack, with a grip-like that of a vise.

Yet his watchful eyes now were upon the boat again, and he luffed her a trifle till he could haul Tom aboard, which was quickly done.

Then he eased away again, and stood close-hauled up the river.

The first furious outburst of the squall was already past, the wind becoming more steady and slowly abating.

"Are you all right, Tom?" inquired Jack, when the worst was over.

"Sure!" exclaimed Tom, quite quickly regaining his breath. "It's lucky you were so near, and you picked me up splendidly. I was going to hang to the boat till she grounded somewhere, when I heard you shout."

"I thought I could pick you up all right," replied Jack. "The boat must be towed over to the east bank, and I wanted your help."

"Well, I'm all right now," cried Tom, scrambling to his feet. "A nasty upset, wasn't it?"

"Accidents will happen," laughed Jack, too generous to be critical.

"That's so."

"Luckily most of the stuff in your boat will not sink, nor be much harmed by the wetting."

"None at all," cried Tom. "I'm glad you have all of our guns and ammunition in your boat. The cooking utensils that are in mine are all stowed in the cubby forward, and we shall not lose them."

"I think we can recover most of the stuff," replied

Jack. "Now lend me a hand, and I'll run down to the leeward of her."

"Going to try to right her?"

"Not until the wind dies down or we get her into shallow water. We'll make fast a line to her headstay and take her in tow as she lies. I think we can make the point with her."

"No doubt of it."

"Can you see Lafe?"

"Yes," answered Tom, gazing out over the windward rail. "He has struck his sail and hauled his boat up. He sees that we are all right, now. He's waving his hand."

"Stand by, then," said Jack. "Take the end of the throat halliard, and be ready to make fast to your headstay when I round up."

"I'm ready," cried Tom, still dripping like a soused sponge.

"Hard-a-lee! Look sharp, now!"

While he spoke Jack deftly rounded to at the leeward of the capsized boat, then ran slowly up to her partly submerged bow, with his own sheet free and sail flapping.

To make fast to the wreck with a line was the work of only a moment, and Jack then filled away again with the disabled craft in tow.

"We can haul her all right," he presently announced. "I'll head straight up to the point where Lafe has landed. I think we can make it without a tack."

CHAPTER VI.

A FLORIDA CRACKER.

"Gee, but you fellows had a fat old time out there! I thought you knew how to handle a boat, Tom."

The above was Lafe Lampton's greeting when, after half-an-hour of tugging and towing, Jack and Tom succeeded in bringing the disabled boat within easy hailing distance of the bank on which Lafe was standing.

It had poured in torrents for about half of the time, one of those violent squalls and showers characteristic of the Florida climate, and all hands were drenched to the skin.

But the rain had now almost ceased, with rifts showing blue sky through the clouds, and with half an eye one could see that it would presently be as clear and hot as before.

Lafe stood grinning on the bank, more amused than anything else; but Jack saw Tom flush quickly at the former's greeting, and he hastened to avert any unpleasantness.

"It was as much my fault as Tom's, Lafe," he shouted laughing. "I drew his attention from his boat by yelling at him, and the squall caught him unprepared. Don't stand there grinning, but come out here and lend a hand to set things right."

"Well, I might as well be as wet as a drowned rat as one half-drowned," laughed Lafe. "So here goes!"

And he plunged out into the shallow water, head, neck, and heels, for some twenty yards or more, to where his companions had brought the capsized boat.

"Wait till I strike my sail," cried Jack, hastening to let go the halliards. "Then we'll haul my boat up to the bank, and all fall to and right this one. I guess there's no great harm done."

"None at all that I can see," replied Lafe, noticing Tom's brief soberness. "It was only an accident. It might have happened to anybody."

This quickly served to set Tom all right again, and one of the boats was speedily hauled to the bank.

To right the other was now an easy matter, and, after it had been done, it was found, as Tom had predicted, that but little of their luggage had been lost, and that of no great consequence.

When the boat had been bailed and hauled up, and the stuff laid out on the bank to dry, Jack turned to his companions and said:

"We all are so wet, boys, that I think we had better make a camp right here and remain until morning. That will give us a chance to dry out this afternoon and put things in shape again. What's your pleasure? Those in favor of the motion say aye!"

"Aye!" roared Tom and Lafe.

"Contra minded, no! It's a vote!" shouted Jack. "Fall to and we'll make camp."

Then the boys came out of their wet coats and went to work.

It was a good location for a camp, on quite a clear rise of the bank, with a background of scrub from which they could gather all the wood they required for a fire. It then was somewhat wet, of course, but could be quickly dried in the hot sun that was momentarily dispelling the last sign of the recent clouds.

A clear, level spot was selected, where the sandy soil already was comparatively dry, and there the poles and crossbar of their tent, an ordinary A tent, were speedily fixed in place.

Next guy-stakes were cut and driven, the duck covering adjusted in place, the guys drawn taut, and the trick was done.

"That's a good enough shelter for a king," declared Lafe, opening the flaps to look inside.

"Aren't we as good as any king?" asked Tom laughing.

"Better than most of them," cried Lafe dryly.

"We now will dig a trench around it," said Jack; "to carry off the flow of water in case it rains again."

"That's the stuff!" cried Lafe. "And to keep out rattlers and every other kind of a crawling thing. I'm not looking to wake up with a diamond-back nestling next to my neck."

"We'll take precautions against anything of that kind," laughed Jack. "You and Tom cut a couple of crotched stakes and fit a cross-piece for our kettle to hang on. While you are doing that I will dig the trench."

Both were done in another quarter-hour, and now things began to look camplike, indeed.

Such provisions as they were to use, their eating implements, cooking utensils, the coffee-pot, pans and tin-cups, their coverings for the night—all of these were quickly whisked up to the tent, and put in their places.

Then Lafe Lampton abruptly asked, with sort of a hungry look appearing in his jolly eyes:

"What do you say, Jack, if I slip out in my boat and shoot a trio of ducks? I saw a lot of them in the creek down yonder. They'd go all right spitted and roasted."

Jack would readily have approved of this scheme,

for he felt quite a good bit peckish himself; but before he could reply all of the boys were startled by a cracking of the dead scrub-brush about a rod up the bank.

As they turned quickly in that direction, there issued from among the low trees, a tall, lank fellow about forty years old, miserably clad, with a ragged slouch hat over his brow and a cob pipe between his teeth.

"By ginger!" thought Lafe, with eyes dilating. "I'll bet this is one of those Florida crackers!"

Jack at once nodded to the man, however, and said pleasantly:

"How are you, stranger?"

The man came down a few steps, thrusting his hands deep down into the pockets of his dirty trousers, and surveyed the boys with a rather sinister eye for several moments in silence.

"What brung you uns round hyar?" he finally demanded, with a sullen, suspicious voice.

"We are here only to camp until morning," replied Jack, by no means fancying the fellow's looks.

"Campin,' hey?"

"That's all."

"Waal, you uns keern't stay hyar."

"Not stay here?" echoed Jack inquiringly.

"Yer mustn't squat round so permiscus."

"But this is not your land, is it?" Jack now demanded, beginning to frown.

"I 'low you uns dunno nuthin' 'bout that," growled the fellow, with a threatening headshake. "Yer keern't squat hyar, nohow. So up stakes an' git out. Them's my orders."

Tom began to look glum and Lafe ugly, but Jack Lightfoot, who felt sure that this man had no right to order them away, now took a decided stand without much change of countenance.

"I hear what you say, mister, but I guess we'll not break camp until morning," he replied firmly.

"Yer reckon yer won't, hey?"

"That is about the size of it, stranger," nodded Jack. "Whether you have any rights in this land, or not, we shall do no harm to it by camping here until morning. So here we intend to stay, unless we are driven off by a stronger force than we can muster."

The man's scrawny brows knit closer, and his eyes took on an uglier gleam when he replied.

"I 'low you uns dunno who I be, does yer?" he slowly demanded.

"No, and we don't care," Lafe now put in impulsively. "What Jack Lightfoot says is right, my man, and it goes."

"Et do, hey?"

"That's what it do, mister," growled Lafe. "We are here to camp, which will do no harm, and here we're going to stay. If you think of rousting us out, go on and get your crowd together and come and try it. You ain't big enough to do it alone, you can bet on that."

"Ef you don't git out to onct, I reckon the kerowd'll come round hyar right smart 'nuff for yer."

"Go ahead and bring 'em, then," retorted Lafe, with a defiant nod at the fellow. "You'll find us right here, mister, waiting and ready for you."

"I reckon you uns won't squat hyar after——"

"That's enough, sir," interposed Jack Lightfoot decidedly. "We don't care to discuss the matter any longer, nor to have any further talk with you. So the sooner you move on about your business, if you have any, the better we shall like it. Come, boys, let's finish our work."

The others took the cue given them, and all turned indifferently away to resume their work.

The stranger remained for several moments, eying them in grim and sullen silence, then muttered something through his scraggly mustache and turned away, presently striding off through the scrub in the direction from which he so unexpectedly had appeared.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" exclaimed Lafe, when the fellow had gone. "If he isn't a cracker, he certainly has all the earmarks of one."

"I guess there's no reasonable doubt of it," laughed Jack.

"He was about as crummy a looking chump as I ever laid eyes on."

"So he was, Lafe, for a fact."

"You are not going to break camp, are you?" asked Tom.

"Not by a long chalk!"

"That's right, Lafe, not at the commands of that fellow," said Jack, very decidedly.

"I should say not."

"He did not speak like one having authority, and I have no faith in his story of owning this land."

"Own land!" cried Lafe derisively. "He looked to me as if he didn't own anything more than the dirty skin he stood in."

"That's right, too."

"His story appeared to me more like a measly bluff," Lafe went on growling. "I'll wager he doesn't show up here again. Did you notice his eyes, how suspicious they looked?"

"I did, Lafe," nodded Tom.

"I'll bet he had some reason for wishing to drive us away, or else he feared that we are here with other designs than hunting and camping."

"What can he have feared?" queried Tom.

"That's more than I can tell. There doesn't appear to be anything for us to steal around in these diggings, unless we make off with one of those scrub palmettos."

"May be he's a hog thief himself," Jack Lightfoot quietly remarked, as there recurred to him the talk he had had with Mr. Linscott on the boat landing that morning.

"By gracious, there may be something in that," cried Lafe.

"Possibly," nodded Tom.

"Be that as it may," added Jack indifferently, "we will borrow no further trouble about the fellow, boys, until it shows up."

"Bosh! I'll bet he will not come back here, crowd or no crowd," growled Lafe contemptuously.

"That is my opinion, too," said Jack. "Instead of going after ducks, however, I think you had better remain with us, Lafe, in case the fellow does return and make trouble."

"Sure thing I will!" cried Lafe promptly. "Gee whiz! if there's anything doing in the line of trouble, Jack, I want to be with the bunch and right in the midst of it."

Jack Lightfoot laughed approvingly, knowing well

how thoroughly loyal and game Lafe was on such occasions.

"Good enough," said he. "We have plenty to fill up on with our canned goods, Lafe, and I'll wager we can serve up a rattling good meal."

"But without any rattlers," cried Lafe laughing. "Let's get at it, Jack. I'm as hungry as a shark."

"Me too!" declared Tom.

"I can put away a good bit myself, I'm thinking," said Jack smiling. "So hustle around, boys, and start a fire. I'll look after getting the table set, or the ground, and will get the grub together."

"That's the stuff!" shouted Lafe.

All hands now set to work again, and soon a rattling fire was blazing on the river bank well down in front of their tent.

The meal Jack Lightfoot provided proved even better than he had predicted—or so at least Lafe Lamp-ton said, and he did full justice to it.

"I feel like an alderman," he declared, rising and slapping his rounded paunch. "Indeed, I do, Jack! Don't I look it?"

Jack laughed genially and admitted that he did.

Then the remains were cleared away, and the boys laid off to rest.

The time passed merrily, and the speeding minutes brought no further signs of the "cracker," nor was he seen again that day.

The Florida twilight quickly deepened into darkness, bringing out a myraid of stars in the purple dome of sky; and for awhile the boys sat around their waning fire, discussing the events of their trip thus far, and planning their enjoyments for the morrow.

They turned in quite early, however, and with tent flaps secured soon were sleeping soundly, with naught to disturb them but faint sounds from the river, or the distant cry of some night-bird sailing overhead.

CHAPTER VII.

A LITTLE LIVE SPORT.

Bang!

Bang! bang!

Bang! bang! bang!

If the above words were audible, the spiteful ring of

several first-class fowling-pieces, the reports would sound just about as the words appear in print.

They had rung from the three guns of the Cranford boys, despite that it was not yet seven o'clock in the morning, the day following their first night in camp.

The novelty of their situation had occasioned one and all to awaken bright and early, nearly as soon as the first streak of red in the eastern sky appeared as the harbinger of Old Sol.

They had at once turned out, finely rested by their undisturbed sleep, and, after a capital breakfast, they had broken camp.

After getting their traps aboard the boats they had quickly gotten under way again, bound down the river, and leaving little behind them as reminders of their visit except a black patch of charred wood and ashes on the silver sand of the river bank.

Before starting, however, they had taken out their fowling-pieces, each providing himself with a good supply of shells, resolved to have a little sport in the way of gunning, and to furnish their larder with the ducks of which Lafe had been deprived by the showing up of the Florida cracker the previous day.

The morning was clear and pleasant, with only a catspaw of wind now and then, just enough to waft their crafts lazily along, and make the handling of them child's play.

The light air was well adapted to the project they had in view, however, and, after putting over toward the east shore, all three had stood down the river, hugging the shore quite closely to take advantage of the numerous little bayous, to the shallow waters and tall grasses masking the nooks to which resorted the many kinds of birds and fowl with which the Indian River abounds.

A couple of miles had been covered in the course of an hour, during which several ducks had been brought down by each of the boys and taken aboard the boats.

With a well-directed shot, moreover, Jack Lightfoot had killed one huge crane, standing over three feet in height, which had started up from the sedge and flown nearly across his bow.

This huge bird, also, Jack had taken aboard, intending to remove the vast wings, to be used as trophies

with which to adorn the shed-room in distant Cranford.

"They will be capital reminders of this outing—if one possibly could need such a thing as a reminder of it," he had said to himself, while surveying the dead bird a little regretfully.

A little later, after rounding a huge clump of mangroves which formed a little island at one side of the river, all hands had drifted into a small bay, or bend of the river, connected with which were several narrow creeks and inlets which made up into the scrubby shore with numerous devious curves and bends.

Here was presented as fantastic a scene as they yet had witnessed, and it was here that the crack of their guns had sounded in such rapid succession.

In the shallow water in all directions about the shore and creeks, were hundreds upon hundreds of tall cranes and herons, some stalking to and fro, some standing idle or intently watching for a fish; together with which were countless awkward pelicans, with their hunched wings and huge pouches, some with the tail of a flapping fish protruding from its gaunt, tremendous bill.

In a way it was a most amusing and ludicrously solemn spectacle, for to these Northern boys this vast colony of uncouth, awkward birds appeared indescribably funny.

"Some of them look as if they were laughing at us," Jack cried to Lafe, as they glided into the bend and lost headway in the lee of the mangroves. "I'm going to have one of those pelicans."

Then the crack of the weapons sounded, one after the other in rapid fire, laying one of the huge creatures in the water, flapping furiously and making vain efforts to fly.

Most of the vast flock rose in the air, however, the pelicans with an exceedingly heavy and awkward flight, the cranes with wild, trumpet-like cries, while the whole cloud of them fairly darkened the sky for several moments.

"I've shot a pelican!" yelled Jack. "I'm going to get him aboard the boat."

"We'll gather in the whole bunch of them," cried Lafe, running his boat up under Jack's starboard quarter.

"We've got no wind in here," replied the latter.

"Never mind," cried Lafe. "Tom is rounding up to us, and we'll strike our sails and make two of the boats fast to these mangrove roots. What a snarly mess of 'em."

"That's so."

"Then Tom and I will get aboard your boat, Jack," added Lafe, hustling about as if his life depended upon it. "Drop your sail, old man! Then we'll work about with an oar and pick up the birds. I'm bound to have them now we have shot them."

"So am I," replied Jack. "The water is hardly a foot deep up here. We can shove around with an oar all right."

"Sure we can. Lower your sail, Tom, and make fast to my boat. I've got a turn with my painter on one of these roots."

"I'm with you," Tom cheerily answered, as he gathered up his housed sail and put a stay around it.

It took but a few minutes to make ready, and then, with all three in Jack's boat, they got out the oar with which it was provided and shoved out from the mangroves to gather the slain birds.

"Gee, but ain't he a monster!" chuckled Lafe, as they began moving forward. "Look at that fellow—he isn't dead yet! Crack him on the head with the oar. Jimminy, I guess that will settle him."

At the end of a quarter-hour they had gathered a good-sized pelican, and a splendid blue heron. With these aboard they put back to the mangroves to get in the shade and rest for a spell, for all were dripping with perspiration.

"Howling mackerels! I never saw such critters as these pelicans," said Lafe, with characteristic humor. "Look at this for a mouth. Get onto his pouch, too. It hangs down like a busted football bladder. Gosh! and here's a dead fish in it, nearly all chawed up."

Tom Lightfoot began to laugh and look wise, and Jack smiled and said:

"Give us a few points about the bird, Tom. You probably know them, even if I don't, though as a matter of fact I should."

"Yes, go ahead, Tom," cried Lafe approvingly.

"I'll tell you what little I remember," said Tom modestly.

"Let her go, old chap."

"The pelican family of birds are all swimmers," began Tom. "They fly also, but their flight is heavy and ungainly, as you observed when some of them rose after we fired. This pouch under the lower mandible, or bill, enters into the throat and is capable of great distension."

"Gee! I should say so," grinned Lafe.

"The pelican feeds chiefly on fish, and macerates them in this pouch. The female feeds her young with fish that have been macerated for some time in her pouch, and this has given rise to the fabulous story that she feeds them by drawing blood from her breast. They inhabit Eastern Europe and Africa, as well as America. That's about all I recall about the pelican."

"Jimminy! there's something in being a bookworm after all," laughed Lafe. "I'm glad we brought you with us."

"Can you tell us anything about the heron?" inquired Jack.

"There are a number of species in that family, also, and this that we have shot is known as the great blue heron," replied Tom. "They frequent ponds and creeks, where they stand for hours watching for a fish, which they capture by transfixing it with this long, sharp bill. Then, unlike the pelican, the heron swallow the fish whole."

"Gee! the glutton," chuckled Lafe, who was in a fever of amusement over their sport.

"They feed on reptiles, mice and small birds, also," added Tom; "and build huge nests of sticks and grass in the trees of the swamps. You notice the head is crested, and from some species of heron are obtained the aigrettes which fashionable ladies wear."

"You'd better take one home to Kate Strawn, Jack," suggested Lafe, with a grin.

"Possibly I shall," smiled Jack, not in the least put out. "I'd rather like to see her now for a few minutes."

"The crane family," continued Tom, with a glance at the huge fellow at his feet, "comprise some of our largest birds. Many of them inhabit dry plains, as well

as the rivers, and they are numerous in sections of the Mississippi valley. As you heard, their cry sounds somewhat like the note of a trumpet."

"Gosh! but you must have a wonderful memory, Tom," said Lafe, with considerable admiration. "I couldn't get all the stuff into my head that you get, to say nothing of carrying it there."

"Never mind, Lafe," laughed Tom. "You make up for it with your stomach."

"You bet," grinned Lafe. "When it comes down to a stomach job, Tom, I'm right in the front row."

"It's a good fault, Lafe, all the same," Jack now remarked, springing up from the thwart on which he was seated. "Let's stow these birds under cover, and then I'm going to make a trip around these mangroves. Did you ever see such a conglomeration of crooked roots! One might walk entirely around the island on them."

"Let's do so," cried Lafe. "What do you say?"

"I'm agreeable."

"And I," added Tom.

Having made Jack's boat fast alongside of the others, the three cruisers now set forth on this new expedition—not a very long one, by the way, as the entire distance around the island was only a few hundred yards.

Yet a large group of mangroves growing out of the shallow water of the river sometimes presents a most curious picture. The gnarled and twisted roots often protrude several feet above the water, and ten or a dozen yards from the tree-trunks, frequently forming entirely around the group a confusing, convoluted mass, much as if an army of monster serpents had writhed and twined themselves together, or as if the trees had thrown out from themselves a huge barricade for mutual protection.

It was upon these protruding roots of the clump of mangroves mentioned that Jack, Tom, and Lafe now proceeded to pick their way, intending to make a circuit of the entire group.

It proved to be quite an arduous trip, this clambering from one patch of twisted roots to another, yet it brought to light several novelties well worth the labor.

In one place, nearly under the trees, they discovered

several lizards, and in another a number of curious little chameleons, one of which they succeeded in catching; only to lose him again a little later, when, in the shallow water directly under their feet, two huge water-snakes suddenly writhed into view with a flash and whirl, only to dart swiftly away to the deeper water.

"Gosh!" yelled Lafe, nearly pitching backward with momentary affright. "Wouldn't those things jar you?"

"They were enough to give a fellow a start," admitted Jack.

"Or the jimjams. I've lost that little four-legged critter with a long tail."

"Never mind," said Tom. "Don't wait to look for him, Lafe. We shall see plenty of them before we leave Florida."

"And many a thing that we have not yet seen," added Jack.

"Humph!" grinned Lafe. "Yonder is one we have not seen before. I wonder if he's another of those crackers."

Jack and Tom glanced quickly in the direction indicated.

The boys had walked partly around the island, and then were nearly opposite a portion of the west bank of the river.

From out one of the narrow creeks previously mentioned a man now appeared rowing a small skiff.

Evidently he had discovered the Cranford boys, moreover, for he was glancing toward them and heading his boat in their direction.

They observed, furthermore, that he had a gun with him, the barrel of which could be seen protruding above the rail of his skiff.

"I wonder what we're up against now," muttered Lafe. "Mebbe we've intruded on another man's preserve and are booked for a second call down. That chap has a gun, too, and can make good if he takes it into his head to do so."

"Whoever he is, Lafe, there is nothing in trying to avoid him," said Jack Lightfoot, seating himself on one of the huge mangrove roots.

"That's right, too."

"He doesn't look so very belligerent," remarked

Tom, as the stranger rowed nearer. "We soon shall learn of what his design consists."

CHAPTER VIII.

JOB DEAN.

Upon arriving about a dozen feet from the waiting boys, the stranger, a middle-aged man in a light gunning-suit, swung his boat around so as to face them, and then laughed quite genially.

"Well, boys, I reckon you are strangers in these parts, aren't you?" he inquired cheerily.

"Yes, sir, we are," replied Jack. "We hail from New England."

"I thought you had the look of a New Englander," laughed the man. "I was born and raised in New Bedford myself."

"Is that so, sir?" cried Jack, with interest.

"Yes. Haven't been North, though, for nearly ten years. Where are you stopping in these parts?"

"With Mr. Linscott, sir, up the river."

"That so? He and I are old friends. Tell him you met Job Dean, and mebbe he'll tell you who I am. I'm only Job Dean, though, as to that."

"Well, you seem to be all right, sir," vouchsafed Lafe laughing. "We're dead sure you are, if you're anything like Mr. Linscott."

"He's a fine fellow," Dean heartily rejoined. "I have a place over yonder, behind the palmettos and live oaks you see there. I was about to slip out for a few ducks, but I reckon you've frightened them off for a spell. I heard your guns as I was leaving home."

"We have some ducks in our boats, sir, just around the mangroves," Jack hastened to rejoin. "If you'll accept them, we'll be glad to give them to you."

"Well, that's a kind offer," said Dean, after a moment. "It would save me from sculling about some in the hot sun, but I don't quite like depriving you of them."

"We shall be glad to have you take them."

"Gee, that's right, sir!" cried Lafe. "We can shoot more than we know what to do with. We have a dozen or more that you'd do us the favor to take off our hands."

"In that case, boys, I shall accept them," Dean now

replied, beginning to back water. "Jump aboard and I'll pull you around to your boats."

The boys readily complied, and Mr. Dean shook hands with each as he came aboard, then rowed lazily around the mangroves.

"I suppose there is no law against gunning around here, is there?" asked Jack.

"Not at this season of the year at any rate," the man laughed. "There are a hundred birds to one marksman in this section, so we require little protective legislation at present. We protect our deer, though, and some birds."

"Well, we ran upon a curmudgeon yesterday who tried to throw us down," put in Lafe. "He ordered us off of the sand ridge across the river, but we declined to stand for it."

"Humph! why didn't he order you to stop breathing," laughed Mr. Dean. "You didn't go, eh?"

"Not so that the chump noticed it."

"What style of a man was he?"

"A cracker, I reckon," said Lafe, then briefly described the fellow.

"I guess you run foul of one of the Pigsons," said Mr. Dean. "Your description about fits Zach Pigson."

"What's he, sir?"

"He's a cracker all right," laughed the man. "He is one of several Pigson families. All of one brood, two of whom have cabins on the opposite side. They are a worthless lot, and Zach is one of the worst of them. I don't quite see, however, why he could have wished to drive you off the peninsula."

"Nor I," said Jack. "We were doing no harm. Fend her off, Tom. Will you come aboard, Mr. Dean, or shall we put the ducks in your skiff?"

They now had arrived at the group of boats, which the boys quickly boarded, relieving the light skiff of its burden.

"No, I think I'll not come aboard," said Mr. Dean, after thanking them for the invitation. "I'll take the ducks you kindly offered me and then return home. I judge from appearances that you are cruising down the river."

"Yes, sir."

"Are you going down to the inlet?"

"Possibly, though we have not yet decided," replied Jack. "We intend putting in about a week in all. We shall return to Mr. Linscott's place by Saturday."

"In that case I may call there to see you and get better acquainted."

"We shall be pleased to have you do so."

"You must visit my place, also, if you find time," added Mr. Dean, now putting off. "Much obliged for the ducks. As for fishing and gunning about here, boys, nobody has a right to prevent you. So go ahead and get all the sport you can."

Jack Lightfoot thanked him again for the information given them, and with a hearty good-by, the boys stood watching him until he, with a parting wave of his hand, disappeared beyond the island.

"He's all right," declared Lafe warmly. "It's a pleasure to meet such a man."

"So it is," assented Jack. "I'm glad we had the ducks to give him, also to have learned something definite about the fellow we encountered yesterday."

"What did he say his name is?" asked Tom.

"Pigson."

"Pretty name," chuckled Lafe. "The last syllable should have been omitted, however, to have hit him more accurately."

"He was a pig all right, for a fact, and, therefore a pig's son," remarked Jack, laughing as he made the pun. "Now what do you say, boys? What shall our next move be?"

Tom glanced out across the river.

"There's a little more wind, Jack," said he. "Let's get under way again and head down-stream till we see a good camping place."

"I'm agreeable to anything."

"Me, too," cried Lafe.

"The sand ridge appears to be quite narrow below here," added Tom. "It will be but a short walk across to the ocean side, where we may find some capital sport exploring the shore. Perhaps, too, we can have a swim, if the breakers are not too dangerous."

"Gee, that's the stuff!" cried Lafe. "A swim in January. Who ever heard of it?"

"That will use up the morning," continued Tom.

"We'll return to our boats at noon and make camp for

the night, and then this afternoon we'll put our rods and lines in shape and have a crack at the river fish."

"Capital!" said Jack approvingly. "You couldn't have planned it better."

"All aboard, then!" shouted Lafe. "I'll bet I'm the first to get under way."

This was the signal for a general hustle, in which Jack, having the advantage of already being on his own boat, came out ahead.

At the end of a short five minutes all three craft were clear of the calm under the mangroves, and were speeding down the river before a freshening breeze.

After a run of nearly three miles Jack sighted a desirable location for their next camp, and he at once signaled his fellow cruisers to make a landing.

The spot selected was near a solitary clump of tall palms, which rose high above the background of scrub pines and saw-palmettos, with a comparatively clear place nearer the river bank, admirably adapted for pitching their tent and making a convenient camp.

"This is out of sight," declared Lafe, as they struck their sails and let the boats glide gently up to the shelving beach. "It's even better than where we camped last night."

"I think we had better pitch our tent before going across the ridge," suggested Jack, while they were engaged in neatly furling sail and securing the boats.

"Why so, Jack?"

"It will be deucedly hot by midday, and we shall be glad enough to find shelter from the sun when we return."

"It's a good idea," said Tom, hastening to get out the tent-poles from under his thwarts. "It will not take a great while."

"Not more than half-an-hour to put everything in shape."

"Let's get at it, then," cried Lafe. "I'm impatient to see the opposite side of this ridge."

CHAPTER IX.

A BATTLE WITH A RATTLER.

"I say, Jack, are you going to take a gun with you?" asked Lafe Lampton, when the camp for the most part

had been made, and the boys were about ready to start on their tramp across the peninsula.

"Yes, I think so," said Jack.

"I would," put in Tom.

"There is no knowing what we may run up against, and it's just as well to be prepared."

"That's my idea," nodded Lafe approvingly. "I'll bring them from the boats and then we'll get a move on."

It was about ten o'clock when the boys started.

Making their way up the ridge, they entered the scrub that grew quite thickly in that locality, which added to the difficulty of walking.

This, together with the yielding sand, upon which the hot sun was pouring down from a cloudless sky, soon had all three dripping with perspiration.

After awhile Lafe Lampton halted to roll up the sleeves of his shirt.

"Gosh! but this is hard going," said he, as his companions also paused. "It's worse than it was up in Hickman's swamp last November, Jack, when we went ducking in cold weather. I'm glad I didn't wear my jacket to-day."

"There's a break in the scrub a little farther on," replied Tom Lightfoot, pointing over the ridge. "There we shall get more of the breeze, and it will be cooler."

"I'm not so very warm," remarked Jack.

"Well, you've got the best of me, you two," returned Lafe. "I've got more fat on me. Lean fellows like you don't sweat much."

"You should cut down your eating," laughed Tom. "Then you wouldn't be so fat."

"Humph! I'd sooner stand the fat," grunted Lafe. "Come on again. I'm ready."

And Lafe once more plunged on with a snort, much as if neither the scrub, nor the thorny plants which were frequently encountered, nor the sun nor the scorching sand, were to check him for any great length of time.

Another hundred yards brought them to the break of which Tom Lightfoot had spoken, and a stretch of almost clear sandy ground opened before them.

Lafe had forged some yards ahead, and was the first

to enter it, breaking out of the dry scrub much like a bull moose out of a thicket.

Here, however, he encountered something that gave him the most horrible shock he had ever had in his life.

It was introduced by the sight of a black streak on the silvery sand, or so at first sight it appeared to Lafe.

Then the streak suddenly moved, and curled up in a triple ring.

A short neck shot upward, a white throat and belly were revealed, a flat, pointed head whipped round in his direction, out of which gleamed and glittered a pair of eyes blacker than jet beads and sharper than needles.

Then came the lightning-like whisk of a pointed black tail—and with it there fell upon the still air that one deadly sound quickest to send a sickening sensation even to the experienced and stanchest heart—the crisp warning note of the venomous rattlesnake.

All of this happened in less than a second, moreover, and Lafe uttered a yell that might have been heard a mile away.

"Wow!"

Then he jumped a good two yards, backward at that, as if his very life depended upon it.

Back into the scrub he came, head, neck, and heels, losing his balance over a chunk of protruding roots and trailing vines, and rolled headlong at the feet of startled Jack and Tom.

"What is it? what is it?" shrieked Jack, terrified despite himself.

For Lafe, white as a piece of chalk, presented a horrible picture of fright as he scrambled wildly to his feet.

"It's a rattler—a rattler!" he yelled, snatching up his gun and darting to one side.

"Look out for him," cried Tom warningly. "He might come this way."

At the same time he started after Lafe.

Jack dropped his fowling-piece into the hollow of his arm, and then darted in the opposite direction.

Naturally enough, knowing the venomous nature of the reptile, and after the serious warning they had received from Mr. Linscott, all hands felt a thrill of dread lest one of them should be struck with the snake's deadly fangs.

For this reason they had scattered almost involuntarily, and, two of them not yet having seen the snake at all, they had moved blindly, so to speak, jumping in the first direction that appealed to them.

As it happened, Jack Lightfoot nearly jumped into the lion's mouth.

The rattlesnake, which was a huge fellow fully five feet in length, had been sunning himself in the hot sand when Lafe broke from the scrub and nearly trod upon him.

Like Lafe, however, the snake's first impulse was to escape, for the rattlesnake does not ordinarily attack an intruder unless cornered or much provoked, in which case he puts up an ugly fight.

It had reared itself in alarm for an instant, however, giving Lafe his terrible shock; but the moment the latter fled the snake also writhed quickly away, equally anxious to escape, and followed the dry sand skirting the edge of the scrub.

It so happened that Jack Lightfoot, darting quickly to one side, took a direction that caused him to head off the fleeing snake, and when Jack leaped out of the scrub he nearly sprang on top of the startled reptile, just as Lafe had done.

It needed only this second attack to arouse the rattlesnake's wrath.

In leaping from the scrub Jack saw the vicious creature beneath him, and, despite himself, he landed on the ground scarce two feet behind him.

Then came a fierce hiss, the quick sweep of a tail, and the wicked thrill of the snake's rattle, as he coiled like a flash and reared himself to strike.

With every nerve quivering, however, Jack proved to be as quick as the snake.

As the venomous head was lunged out and downward, with fangs protruding, Jack left the ground as quickly as if he had alighted on a red-hot stove with his bare feet.

The snake struck the empty air.

Jack made a second wild leap, then instinctively glanced back and yelled, wildly:

"He's here, boys! Here he is!"

Then, to his added horror, he saw that the snake, instead of again trying to escape—was pursuing him!

It was scarce three feet away.

Not daring to wait to use his gun, lest he should be struck in the foot or leg before he could shoot the enraged reptile, Jack gave another appalling yell, and ran for his life.

A solitary pine tree some ten yards away, with a single branch some eight feet above the ground, quickly caught his eye.

Toward this he ran.

With the snake still behind him, Jack dropped his gun and made a flying leap.

He had measured the distance accurately.

He caught the extending branch with both hands, whirled quickly up and over it, then came down astride it quite as if it had been a horizontal bar, and he indulging only in a little stunt at gymnastics.

He did not feel quite the same, however, for his blood ran cold, his flesh creepy, and his every nerve tense and strained.

The rattlesnake had whirled fiercely around directly under the branch, then reared itself in a belligerent coil, with its head raised a foot or more from the ground, its fangs viciously darting out, and its tail keeping up an almost incessant rattle.

Apparently it had given up all intention of flight, and now was looking only for trouble.

Jack no longer felt any serious alarm, however, being well out of reach, and the entire episode, in so far as he had figured in it, had occupied only a few seconds.

Now a shout reached his ears, and Lafe came plunging from the scrub some twenty yards away.

At first he could not locate Jack.

"Where are you?" he yelled. "Where are you, Jack?"

"Here in the tree," shouted Jack. "And the snake is right under me."

"Holy smoke!"

"Don't shoot from that distance!" roared Jack warningly. "The shot might scatter. You're loaded for ducks and may plug some of them into my legs."

Lafe had brought his gun to his shoulder, and was about to fire.

Now he paused, however, seeing that Jack was safe for a time, and cried:

"Hold on a bit! The snake is not moving from his position. I'll sneak around back of the tree and plug him at close range."

"Where's Tom?" cautioned Jack. "Look out that you don't hit him."

"I'm here, Jack."

The last came from Tom himself, and his head protruded from the nearer scrub some twenty feet from the coiled snake, a point to which he had hastened upon hearing Jack's first yell for help.

Now Lafe also saw him and shouted:

"Stay where you are, Tom. Don't fire from there. I'll sneak around the tree and shoot the varmint's head off."

Lafe was proceeding to execute this sanguinary threat even while he spoke.

With his gun ready, crouching like an Indian on a trail, he was stealing in a circuit to get behind the tree and shoot the snake from a few feet away.

The snake saw him, however, and took it into his threatened head to look for other prey.

With an angry hiss and rattle it suddenly lit out straight for Lafe.

Lafe uttered a yell, but it was drowned by the thundering report of one of the guns.

The moment the snake had started from under the branch, leaving Jack well out of danger from any scattering shot, Tom Lightfoot had jerked his gun to his shoulder and fired both barrels at the moving reptile.

His aim was true to the mark.

In an instant the snake was only a writhing, twisting, bleeding object on the loose white sand.

Yet Lafe, half-frenzied with excitement, now set upon it with clubbed gun, which he wielded with all the energy and zest with which he frequently had swung old "Wagon-tongue," when the bases were full and a hit needed to pull a game out of a hole.

Jack now came down from his perch, and a moment later the three boys stood gazing down at all there was left of the rattlesnake.

Their faces were a little pale, for an encounter with

a rattlesnake is never an agreeable one, and this not only was their first experience, but it also was an unusually stirring one.

A measurement showed the snake to be five feet and one inch in length, truly a monster, and Jack remarked with a feeling of genuine relief:

"Well, this is my first one, boys, and I hope it may be my last. I never could endure snakes."

"Nor I," declared Lafe. "Gosh! I almost felt his fangs in my legs the moment he reared up at me."

"He was a wicked fellow, surely," observed Tom. "A mighty big one."

"It's a diamond-back, isn't it?" asked Lafe, stooping to study the double row of confluent spots marking the reptile's dark back.

"Yes, no doubt of it," said Tom. "Here are his rattles at the end of his black tail. I'm going to cut them off for a reminder of this adventure."

"Gee whittaker! I'll never need any reminder of it," cried Lafe. "I bet I'll dream of snakes every night for a month."

Nevertheless, Tom Lightfoot cut off the rattlesnake's tail, which he wrapped in a piece of palmetto leaf to take back to the camp.

CHAPTER X.

A GLANCE AHEAD.

With eyes more alert after the adventure with the snake, the boys now proceeded on their way across the sandy ridge.

A walk of about ten minutes brought them to the coast side, and here there spread before them not only a boundless expanse of the broad, blue Atlantic, but also miles upon miles of a beach nearly as level as a floor, and of silvery whiteness in the rays of the midday sun.

There was but a light air stirring, with scarcely any swell from the ocean, and the breakers, which at times roll in along this low peninsula with thundering violence, now were hardly more than a pleasant ripple on the shore.

"By ginger! I'm going in swimming," declared Lafe, after looking about for a few moments. "I want to wash the recollections of that snake out of me."

"I don't blame you," laughed Tom. "Yet I have heard that there are sharks in these waters, so we had best be careful and hug the beach."

"By all means," supplemented Jack. "Let's wait until we cool off a little, Lafe, and then we'll all go in."

"Sure thing. I'm always ready to do what the rest wish."

"Not deeper than our waists, however, any one of us."

"Well, I reckon that will give me water enough for a dip," laughed Lafe. "Hello! I wonder what made these tracks."

In the dry sand well up from the water's edge was a curious uncouth marking, as if some awkward creature had waddled up out of the sea, and taken a solitary promenade along the silvery beach.

Between the markings, which resembled irregular grooves, was a deeper indentation, much as if the creature had dragged behind him a tail too heavy to carry.

Tom Lightfoot examined them for a moment, then laughed.

"That's the trail of a sea-turtle," said he.

"A turtle!" echoed Lafe. "Gee whiz! it must have been a bouncer."

"So it was," replied Tom. "They are found very large in this latitude. These grooves on each side were made by his flippers, as he waddled along; and this deeper mark between them was left by his heavy body and lower shell, which he rather dragged than raised in walking."

"I guess you're right, Tom," nodded Jack Lightfoot.

"Oh, there is no doubt about what left such a trail," replied Tom. "It was left by a logger-head turtle all right."

"I'd like to see one," said Lafe.

"We possibly might do so if we waited and watched, but that would hardly be worth the while. The females come here in the dry sand to lay their eggs, generally in May or June, and some of the settlers in many localities make a business of hunting for them. If we could catch a good green turtle now we would have some soup," added Tom.

"I wonder what I'd do with a bowl of turtle soup," said Lafe, with indescribable drollness. "I think I could flirt with it in a way that would startle the natives."

"It wouldn't go bad, Lafe, for a fact," laughed Jack.

"Not having any soup to go into me, however, I'm going into the soup myself. In other words, the ocean," cried Lafe, beginning to strip off his clothing. "If any good fellows want to go with me, let them come on."

Tom and Jack needed no further invitation, and soon all of them were sporting in the cool salt water, enjoying a swim in January, while some of their friends in the distant Cranford were blowing warmth into their finger-tips, or shielding them from the wintry blasts with woolen gloves or mittens.

It was noon when the boys came out and dressed, and then prepared to return to their camp across the sand ridge.

As in all such outings, with novelties on every hand, with new objects of interest constantly claiming one's attention, time speeds away with rapid wings, and a day seems scarcely to have dawned when, lo! it has begun to wane.

The boys returned leisurely across the sand ridge, and it was well into the afternoon when they arrived in camp.

Lafe threw himself down on the bank, heaved a sigh and looked about for a moment, then said:

"Gee! I hate to confess it, Jack, but I'm blessed if I'm not tired."

Jack laughed and took a seat near-by.

"You have a right to be, Lafe," said he. "It is owing less to the labor, however, than to the newness of things and the excitement."

"I guess that's right, Jack," nodded Lafe. "Along with squalls and crackers, with herons, and cranes, and pelicans, to say nothing of trudging miles through soft sand, and battling with deadly rattlers—jimminy crickets, Jack, I guess there's no doubt you're right!"

"So we'll just lie around here this afternoon, and cut out further sporting till to-morrow," said Jack. "A little later we will cook up a ripping good dinner, then put in a long night's sleep. We still have several

ducks aboard, and I'll wager, Lafe, that even you shall be satisfied."

"Gee, I'm always satisfied, barring when I encounter a rattlesnake," laughed Lafe. "Then I'm more than satisfied."

Jack sat for some moments gazing at the sand at his feet.

Presently he looked up and said thoughtfully:

"It's a bit curious, Lafe, that the element of danger must figure strongly in an adventure for a man to get the most out of it. Do you know, Lafe, I really got more real fun out of that rattlesnake fight than if death had not been the result of a strike from him."

"Me—too," said Lafe drowsily.

"That was one of the dangers against which Mr. Linscott warned us," Jack musingly went on. "The other was wildcats. I wonder if we'll run across any of them during the week to come. I've got a feeling that I rather hope we may. I think I'd really like to encounter at least one good, big, busy bobcat. That Florida cracker, too, Zach Pigson, I've sort of got it into my head that he could tell us something about Mr. Linscott's missing hogs. I'd like to aid our good friend, Linscott, in that matter, if I could, and prevent further stealing from him. In a way that would repay him for his kindness to us. If we could do that, Lafe, and down one good wildcat, I should feel satisfied to——"

He abruptly stopped, glancing up at his fellow cruiser.

Lafe Lampton had snored—he was sound asleep.

Jack Lightfoot did not really anticipate it just then, yet, as coming events often cast their shadows before, his musings were but forerunners of stirring episodes in the week to come.

THE END.

During that week our young cruisers were destined to see many more strange sights, and participate in many adventures that would remain a memory of their cruise down the wonderful Indian River long after they returned North to the land of the Frost King. These we will present to our readers in the next issue of ALL-SPORTS, to be entitled "Jack Lightfoot's Plans; or, Wrecked on Indian River."

HOW TO DO THINGS

By AN OLD ATHLETE.

Timely essays and hints upon various athletic sports and pastimes in which our boys are usually deeply interested, and told in a way that may be easily understood. Instructive articles may be found in back numbers of the ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY, as follows: No. 31, "How to Make a Cheap Skiff." No. 32, "Archery." No. 33, "Cross-Country Running." No. 34, "The Game of Lacrosse." No. 35, "The Boy With a Hobby for Collecting." No. 36, "Football, and How to Play It." No. 37, "A Practice Game." No. 38, "How to Play Football—Training." No. 39, "The Men in the Line." No. 40, "The Men Behind." No. 41, "Signal Systems." No. 42, "Team Play." No. 43, "The End of the Season." No. 44, "A Gymnasium Without Apparatus." (I.) No. 45, "A Gymnasium Without Apparatus." (II.) No. 46, "Bag-Punching."

CAMPING.

The only difficulty about writing upon this interesting subject lies in the necessity for condensing a tremendous amount of information into a very small space. Volumes could be written about the delights of camping, and still much remain unrecorded.

In a general way, then, we shall touch upon what constitutes the necessities of camp life, when the utmost pleasure is expected to be derived from the outing.

The writer has had unusual opportunities for indulging in this charming and fascinating outdoor life, ranging all the way from the Muskoka region in Canada, down through the Middle States, and along the Atlantic Coast to southern Florida, so that it stands to reason he should be in a position to give some common-sense and practical hints upon the subject.

First of all, then, it must be understood that what would apply for one region might be wholly out of place in another—blankets and heavy woolen garments come in very pat up among the pines of Maine and Michigan, but, as a rule, they prove a weariness to the flesh down along the sunny Indian River in Florida—though, by the way, there are occasions, with a fierce Northern raging along that same beautiful lagoon, when the camp-fire of fat pine, and a jolly blanket prove very acceptable to the camper and his fellow voyagers.

Besides, most outings in Florida are taken upon the water, and the accompanying boat allows of much "dunnage" being carried that would of necessity have to be cut out of a canoe trip, where long "carries" are frequent, or on a tramp into the primeval wilderness of the Far North.

We will, therefore, take it for granted that our young friends intend to go into camp somewhere in the Adirondacks, and can employ a team or buckboard to transport themselves and the material for their outing, with perhaps even a boat on top of it all, to the lonely lake that is to be the scene of their summer campaign.

In such an article on camping-out it would perhaps be wise to divide the subject into several heads, and naturally the first of these would be the

SELECTION OF THE CAMP SITE.

A great deal may depend upon the wisdom shown in choosing the spot where days, and possibly weeks, are to be spent, and stormy weather, as well as fair, to be encountered.

Avoid getting too near a swamp or marshy tract, since the miasma arising from such a place is apt to sow the seeds of malaria in the system. Select ground where you can look out upon the water, for your greatest pleasure will be in that quarter. At the same time let there be

a little drop to the ground, so that it will drain well during a continued rainy spell. The wise camper is always preparing himself for the bad time that may come.

After putting up your tent, with the opening toward the lake, dig a shallow trough or ditch around the back and sides, so as to encourage the water to flow off. Then cover the floor space inside with some six inches of hemlock browse, if you can get it—straw affords a fair substitute in a pinch, and over this spread your blankets.

Your fire will be just in front, and should the night be cool you are apt to enjoy the blaze very much. As to the making of a fire, that is a subject well worthy of respect, since it is the little god whom all campers, young as well as old, worship; and it deserves an article all to itself. We will try to do justice to it later on.

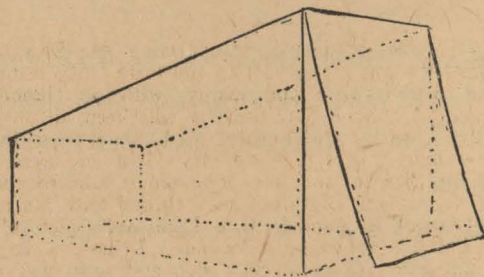
Of course you have chosen a site near which there is a crystal spring, for the lake water is apt to be warm, or at least insipid, for drinking in the summer, being besides a good breeding-place for those germs that seem to be lurking in wait for so many suspicious souls.

Many little conveniences can be arranged readily enough by boys who like to be comfortable—indeed, to many of us, half the joys of camping-out spring from taxing one's ingenuity in fashioning a landing for the boat, a closet for the tinware out of a box, a rude table upon which to set the meals, a model cooking fireplace, and such things as are apt to add to the pleasure of all concerned. A month of this dependence upon one's self for everything has been the making of many a lad who, up to that time, had not suspected what lay dormant within him, and had never before been thrown upon his own resources.

Whether your stay in the wilderness be of long or short duration, it is of considerable importance that you be well housed, and this brings us to the subject of

THE TENT.

Old campaigners, like the veteran "Nessmuk," are capable of making a serviceable shelter out of boughs in



THE SHANTY TENT IN USE.

less than an hour's time, and one that answers a temporary purpose very well; but for a protracted stay something more substantial is needed. This may be found in the regulation army A tent, though a walled one is more comfortable, if the additional weight in carrying the same is a matter of no consequence. There is also a sportsmen's tent on sale which is very good; and the writer has passed many comfortable nights under one of this type, in various camps North and South.

All these tents really require a fly over them, in order to shed water, unless the canvas has been especially prepared with waterproof material; and such a thing is difficult to buy, though it can be made rain-proof at home with some trouble.

Some ingenious boys prefer to make their own tent, and

(Continued on page 30.)

A CHAT WITH YOU

Under this general head we purpose each week to sit around the camp fire, and have a heart-to-heart talk with those of our young readers who care to gather there, answering such letters as may reach us asking for information with regard to various healthy sports, both indoor and out. We should also be glad to hear what you think of the leading characters in your favorite publication. It is the editor's desire to make this department one that will be eagerly read from week to week by every admirer of the Jack Lightfoot stories, and prove to be of valuable assistance in building up manly, healthy Sons of America. All letters received will be answered immediately, but may not appear in print under five weeks, owing to the fact that the publication must go to press far in advance of the date of issue. Those who favor us with correspondence will please bear this in mind, and exercise a little patience.

THE EDITOR.

Having read several of your fine weeklies, I would like you to answer my questions. My measurements are as follows: Height, 5 feet; weight, 88 pounds in street clothing; neck, 12½ inches; shoulders, across, 16 inches; around, 36 inches; chest, 30 inches; waist, 25 inches; biceps, 8½ inches; forearm, 9 inches; wrists, 6½ inches; thighs, 18 inches; calves, 12 inches; ankles, 8 inches. 1. How are my measurements? 2. What are my strong and weak points? 3. Does my height correspond with my weight? 4. Is mush a wholesome food? 5. Do my measurements come up to the average boy's measurements of my age?

K. K. M.

Bedford City, Va.

1. Your measurements seem to be very good for a boy of your size and weight.
2. You have no especially "strong" points, nor do you appear, on the other hand, to be weak in any particular.
3. Just about.
4. Yes, it is always said to be, though you know the old Bible injunction that "man must not live by bread alone," and we think the same would apply to the food you mention.
5. Yes.

I have just finished reading your charming ALL-SPORTS, and my chum thinks it's fine; it is just to my taste. My taste calls for something that is true and manly, with no "blood-and-thunder" in it, and I hope Mr. Stevens will keep all such out of ALL-SPORTS. I am in the hospital with hip disease and do not know how long I will have to stay. Did you ever know anybody with hip disease, and how long did it take to cure it? I will be glad when Jack Lightfoot goes abroad with his troupe. Do you ever expect to publish Jack Lightfoot's picture, with his chums? I think it would take fine. I have a room at home that I am going to fit up as a den and wish you would advise me as to the best way of making it look snug at a small cost. Hoping I have not written too long a letter, I remain, a warm admirer of ALL-SPORTS. Hurrah for Jack Lightfoot and Lafe Lampton and all the Cranford crowd. I have got lots of my friends to read ALL-SPORTS. Well, good-bye, from a would-be athlete, a crank,

H. S.

Richmond, Va.

We cannot say how long it might take to cure your trouble, but we hope you will soon be home to carry out your design about arranging a cozy den. It would take more space than we can spare in this department to give you hints as to how you could best accomplish this. Perhaps, some time, we may have an article on this subject in our "How To Do Things." We do not expect to print the pictures you speak of, though possibly it might be done later if there was sufficient interest shown by the admirers of Jack Lightfoot.

I thought I would write a few words telling how much I like the ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY. I think ALL-SPORTS and the *Tip Top*

lead all other weeklies. I think Jack Lightfoot is an ideal American youth. I like all the rest of his friends. I am collecting souvenir postal cards and will be glad to exchange with anybody who sends me one. My comrades tell me that the applause column is only a fake, but I thought I would write a few lines to see if it is or not.

WARREN E. FORD.

P. O. Box 261, Mechanicville, N. J.

I haven't seen any letters from this town for some time, though I know that there are a great many readers here. So I thought I would write and tell you what I think of the ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY. Every one I know who reads it says that he likes it. Although I am a girl, I enjoy it as much as any of my boy friends, and look forward each week with as much delight to getting it from the news-stand as they do. I like Jack Lightfoot and all his friends; he is so manly. Then he has so much pride and independence. Long live Jack and his friends.

Paterson, N. J.

MINNIE JOHNSON.

Jack's girl friends are as loyal to him as any of the boy readers, and we are glad to welcome you among his admirers. We appreciate your pleasant letter.

I have read the ALL-SPORTS since the first number came out, and think it "out of sight." Three cheers for Jack Lightfoot and Maurice Stevens, the author.

A CANUCK.

Toronto, Ont.

The ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY is not only "out of sight," as you say, but is always "in sight," for all boys on the street can be seen reading it. By the pleasant expression on their faces it seems that they think it is the best they ever read. Jack Lightfoot does so many wonderful things that they can't stop till they reach the end of the last chapter.

I have read nearly all numbers of ALL-SPORTS, and while I didn't like them very well at first I do now, and read them every week. They are now running *Tip Top* a race for first place.

I think Jack, Lafe, Phil, Nat and some of the rest are certainly fine, but wish there were a few more good spunky athletic American girls in Cranford to make more life to the stories. I have over five thousand libraries and papers, which I will gladly exchange with other readers who will write and send lists.

I think Jack is a fine pitcher, but does he not owe much of his success to Lafe? I wish old Lafe went to school here. I pitch for our high school team, but we always have to use the town team catcher, for no one in school will catch me. I also pitch for the town team in the summer. Should like to hear from anyone interested in athletics. We have a basket-ball team here and I play right forward. Hope Jack gets up a team. Finish Boralmio up quick, for he is a villain. What is the matter with forming a correspondence club? I wish a number of your readers, both boys and girls, would write to me, and I will answer all letters.

Can't you print pictures of all the boys and girls, as Jack and Daisy, one each week, on inside cover of ALL-SPORTS? I should be pleased to write to the following if they will send me their names: A Girl with Gray Eyes, of Leavenworth, Kan.; Genevieve Raymond, Denver, Colo.; A Nellieite, San Francisco, Cal.; An Ardent Admirer, Argenta, Ark.; C. E. A. Defiance, Ohio; Unknown, Honey Grove, Tex. Hoping to see this in print as soon as possible, and wishing Jack's football team, all his chums and ALL-SPORTS the best of success,

EDWARD M. MARSH.

Pine Island, Minn.

Some time we may conclude to print the pictures of the leading characters in the Jack Lightfoot stories, as you and others suggest. A correspondence club might be a good thing, and our readers can take the matter in hand as they please.

I am very fond of football, and you can well believe that I've been watching eagerly to see what Mr. Stevens would do with Jack and his chums on the gridiron. And now that I've read some of the numbers containing the record of games played I can't keep from writing to say how pleased I have been with them. The talented author certainly knows his business all right, and I guess the boys will join me in saying that better football stories it would be hard to find. I'm an old *Tip Top* admirer, but I must say ALL-SPORTS is giving the universal favorite a run for the money. I hope to be always able to read both, for I've somehow become as much attached to Jack Lightfoot as I've always been to the Merriwells. I did take another so-called athletic weekly for a time, but it was a "ringer," and the attempt at character drawing so poorly executed that I called it off. I think the Lightfoot stories occupy a distinct field by themselves, and the author has succeeded in creating a series of characters that seem very real. That is always the secret of success in writing for boys, who are quick to get on to dummy figures. Well, I'd better close, if I hope to get this in print. With regards and best wishes to the author, not forgetting the publishers,

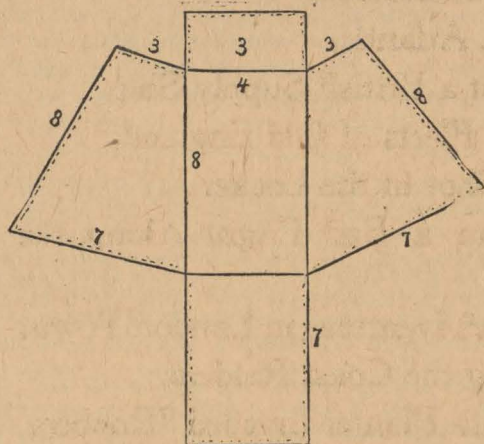
Harrisburg, Pa.

EDWARD L. SCOTT.

We are glad to hear from you, Edward, and trust that your friends are as well satisfied with ALL-SPORTS as you seem to be. Write again when the spirit moves.

("How to do Things")—Continued from page 28.

to please such we give two designs of a box, or shanty tent, spread out and erected, that, while not a thing of beauty, is a joy forever, when it comes to solid comfort. The sportsmen's shanty tent mentioned before is really fashioned after this same style, only on a larger scale—the one given would be rather small for two persons, though they could crowd in if necessary.



THE FLAT SHAPE OF A HOME-MADE SHANTY TENT.

There is another subject that seems of prime importance to the would-be camper—that of

INSECT LIFE,

mosquitoes, gnats, black flies and such pests, that are apt to make life in the woods less of a pleasure than has been anticipated. The following lotion, tried and tested under many aggravating conditions, will be found equal to anything known, and far superior to the anti-mosquito salves usually sold at a high price. It is to be rubbed well into the skin at every exposed part, so that it really forms a pretty good coat of varnish. Of course while thus encased you must abandon the pleasures of soap and water for a time, but when the flies are bad a wise man is willing to forget all else, if so be he can laugh at their efforts to get at him.

Take three ounces of pine tar, two ounces of castor-oil, one ounce of pennyroyal oil—simmer all together over a slow fire, and bottle for use. When this glaze is finally washed off it leaves the skin soft and clear.

And now we have reached the very important subject of

CAMP COOKERY.

The necessities in the way of cooking-utensils are confined to a few things—the generous frying-pan, without which no camp could ever be a joy; a tin coffee-pot of sufficient dimensions, with the lip and handle riveted on rather than soldered, so that they may not drop off in the intense heat to which the article will be subjected; cups and pannikins of granite ware, as being the easiest to scour; common steel knives and forks; cheap spoons; a keen-edged butcher knife, fashioned after a manner to suit the cook's fancy, and there are several good shapes; a large spoon for stirring things and ladling out; and a couple of fair-sized granite kettles, with covers, and a bale so that they may be hung over the fire when it is desired to cook rice, potatoes, beans, soup, or for par-boiling tough joints of squirrel and such things, before dropping into the frying-pan.

That is the limit of actual needs, though some fastidious campers will burden themselves with more culinary specimens, most of which may never be used. A couple of iron rods, each about eighteen inches long, will come in very handy at the fire, for resting coffee-pot or pan upon when the width of the fireplace forbids their nesting comfortably across.

Above all, be sure of a hatchet—if convenient to tote an ordinary every-day ax along, do so, for it will come in handy, since the amount of firewood burned in camp, when nights are cool, is amazing, and the ordinary camp hatchet is often found a delusion and a snare. Don't forget a handful of fair-sized nails—they will come in useful for hanging things up.

As for food, every camping party must be a law unto themselves, and our limited space in this one article will only allow naming those articles that are really considered indispensable by old and seasoned sojourners in the woods.

These can be set down as ground coffee, tea, sugar, oatmeal or hominy, rice, self-raising flour—for flap-jacks, cracker-dust—for frying fish in, condensed milk, onions, potatoes; some canned goods, if they may be conveniently carried, such as corn, succotash, Boston baked beans, peas, and tomatoes; a strip of tempting breakfast bacon; several pounds of pink-white salt pork, a few slices of which comes in handy when frying anything. Butter and eggs are good, and may possibly be bought from neighboring farmers—they are difficult to take into the woods.

The camp mess-chest, with its nest of eight square cans of galvanized material, each having a wide screw top, is the only proper receptacle for all such things as coffee, tea, rice, etc. Of course salt and pepper must never be forgotten. And, above all, in the estimation of a hungry camper, there is perhaps no one object of food that affords him such intense satisfaction as he sniffs at the savory atmosphere and awaits the welcome tinpan summons to dinner, as does that common, low-down, but insidious odor of those frying onions—on your life, don't forget to smuggle some of these in your kit, if you have to leave other things behind.

STIRRING SEA TALES

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- 4—Paul Jones' Bold Swoop; or, Cutting Out a British Supply Ship.
- 5—Paul Jones' Strategy; or, Outwitting the Fleets of Old England.
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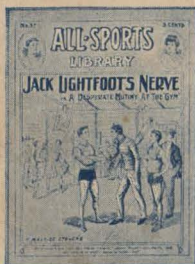
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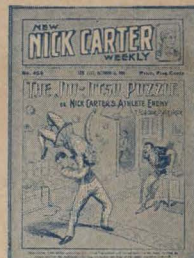
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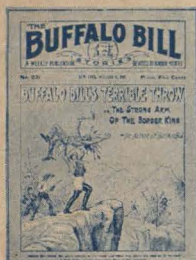
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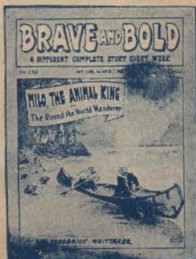
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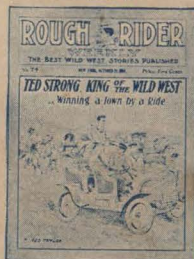
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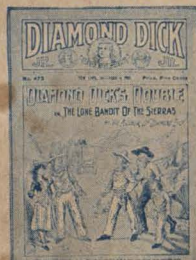
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